



# MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE

VOLUME 3

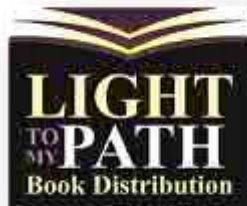
A Devotional Look  
at Christ's Trial,  
Crucifixion, Resurrection  
and Ascension

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

# Matthew, Mark and Luke

## Volume 3

A Devotional Look at Christ's Trial,  
Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension



**F. Wayne MacLeod**

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Matthew, Mark and Luke

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## Foreword

Matthew, Mark and Luke recount the story of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ from His birth to His resurrection and ascension. There is a lot of repetition in the accounts of these three writers. They tell the same story. In the interest of not repeating myself, I have decided to examine the accounts together. The stories of Matthew, Mark and Luke not only complement each other but, when examined together, give us a better picture of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus.

I have faced several problems doing this harmony of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Probably the biggest problem had to do with the order of events. The gospel writers do not always include the events of the life of Christ in the same order. This is to be expected as each author has a different purpose. This commentary is not an authority on the order of events recorded in these Gospels.

Another problem I encountered is really more of a problem for the reader. Because I am commenting on three gospels at the same time, the reader is forced to jump from one passage to another. I apologize for this and realize that this makes it difficult to find a specific passage. To simplify this I have provided an index of passages and the chapter where the reader can find the commentary. Consult the index if you are looking for a particular passage.

The large quantity of material covered in these three Gospels presented yet another challenge. I have decided to cover the material in three volumes. In this third volume we will examine the arrest, trial, crucifixion, resurrection and

ascension of the Lord Jesus. See the index for a list of passages covered in this third volume.

I pray that this commentary will reveal the work and teaching of Jesus to you in a greater way. May it point you to His great work on your behalf. May it challenge you to greater surrender and love for Him and for what He did on the cross.

This commentary, as with all the others in this series, is designed to be devotional in nature. My desire is that it not only impart knowledge but also life. It is my desire that each reader understand the passage and be changed by its truth. I trust that you will be a different person for working through these important Bible books. May God bless you richly as you embark on this study.

F. Wayne MacLeod

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# 1

## THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

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Read Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44

For some time now the Lord Jesus has been making His way to Jerusalem. As He and His disciples approached the city, the Lord Jesus sent two of His disciples ahead. He told them to go to a certain village and they would find a donkey tied with a young colt nearby. They were to untie them and bring them to him. Matthew 21:2 gives us the clear impression that both the colt and the donkey were brought to Jesus. Mark and Luke tell us that this young colt had never been ridden.

We are left to wonder why the Lord Jesus chose to ride a young colt that had never been ridden. I don't expect that a king in that day would ever have chosen to enter a city riding on a young donkey that had never had anyone on its back. It would take a certain amount of time to train a young donkey to allow someone on its back. The fact that this colt was willing to let Jesus ride on it when it had never had anyone ride it before was itself a miracle.

Normally when a king came into a city he came riding His war horse. The colt was a very simple animal. He was not a finely decorated war horse. This particular donkey was borrowed from an ordinary person in the community. He was a humble animal. Jesus came into Jerusalem in humility.

The colt was young. It had a full life ahead of it. This colt was a symbol of something new. He was the symbol of hope and a future.

The colt was inexperienced. He had never before been ridden by any other man. As a simple and inexperienced animal he was given the task of taking the Lord Jesus to the community of Jerusalem to accomplish the greatest task ever accomplished. He brought Jesus to the city where He would be crucified and would die for the sins of the world. I find this symbol quite refreshing. We too are simple and ordinary people given the responsibility to carry the Lord Jesus into communities all around this world.

As the disciples went into the village in obedience to the Lord's command, Jesus told them that if anyone asked why they were untying the colt they were to tell them that the Master needed him. Jesus knew the owners would willingly surrender their colt for this purpose. Notice how the Lord did not ask, He simply came and took. Remember that all we have belongs to Him already. He does not need to ask for what is His. Have you surrendered all you have to Him? Would you, like the owner of the colt, willingly surrender to Jesus? How often do we fight to hold onto our possessions? How often has the work of the kingdom been hindered because we have refused to surrender what is already God's?

It should be understood that God's ways are not our ways. Jesus asked for an inexperienced colt that no one had ever sat on. Can you imagine the owner of that colt saying: "This colt has never been ridden; he would not be good for the Lord? Let me offer my fine horse instead." The Lord was not looking for a fine war horse. The Lord wanted the colt. The disciples don't question the wisdom of the Lord, nor did the owner.

There will be times when we will not understand the ways of the Lord. Why should He use weak people with all kinds of flaws when there are more experienced and wiser people He could use? We allow human wisdom and reason to override what the Lord is asking. God's ways are not our ways. They will not always make sense to us but the challenge of this passage is for us to surrender to Him even when we don't understand.

Matthew tells us that these events that took place that day were in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9:

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The disciples did exactly what the Lord told them. They arrived in the village and found the donkey with the colt and began to untie it. The owners asked them what they were doing and they responded as Jesus told them, saying that the Master needed him. The owners let them take the colt.

They brought the colt to Jesus and when they had placed their cloaks on it, Jesus mounted its back. Again we see

the simplicity here. Their cloaks were used as a saddle blanket.

As Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem a large crowd welcomed Him. They threw their cloaks on the road as He rode by. Some cut branches from trees and spread them out before Him. Placing these objects in front of the Lord was the crowd's way of showing their respect. Even in our day when people of significance come to our community we often roll out a red carpet for them to walk on. This is what was happening on that day.

We can only wonder what the colt would have been feeling at this point. He had never been ridden. The crowds would have made it very nervous. We have no record, however of the colt bolting or reacting to the crowd. It appears to continue toward Jerusalem. It may be that the mother was alongside of the colt (see Matthew's account). This would have helped in calming it. More importantly, however, we need to see the work of God in keeping the colt calm despite the confusion all around. He will do the same for us.

As Jesus moved into the city, the crowd began to shout out:

Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! (Matthew 21:9).

The word "hosanna" literally means "save now." In calling out this word, the crowd is asking Jesus to save them. Admittedly, the salvation they sought was not the salvation He had come to offer. They were expecting a political salvation. They recognized that Jesus came from God. They had seen His miracles and had drawn their conclusions. Those conclusions, however, would soon be put to the

test. Very soon they would be calling out very different words. Instead of calling out "Hosanna," they would be calling for His crucifixion. There are many people like this. They are moved by emotion and by what they see. They follow the crowd and seem devoted but when the least struggle comes, their commitment withers away; the slightest hint of difficulty and they turn their backs on the one they proclaim as Lord and King.

The whole city was stirred by the entrance of Jesus. The city was in such an uproar that the Pharisees called out to Jesus to rebuke the crowd and tell them to be quiet. Jesus told them that if these people did not cry out, then the stones would cry out His praise. The Pharisees did not understand the significance of that entrance into Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus entered the city to die. He entered the city to conquer sin, death and the devil. The greatest battle the world had ever known was about to take place. The forces of hell were about to be released on the Lord Jesus. Heaven held its breath while Jesus surrendered to the cruel hands that crucified Him. The whole world would feel the impact of the work that would take place there in Jerusalem. This was time for rejoicing and celebration. The world could not be silent at such a time as this. If people did not cry out then the rest of creation would.

Deep in His heart the Lord Jesus grieved at the blindness of those around Him. They could not see the truth. As the city of Jerusalem loomed up before him, Jesus wept over it saying, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:43). Though they rejoiced and praised the Lord that day, they were totally blind to the reality of what He was going to accomplish. The cross for them was the end. They saw it as a symbol of defeat. The city would turn its back on Jesus. That day they cried out and welcomed

Him, but the welcome would not last. Jesus was not fooled by the outward show of praise and adoration. He looked beyond these externals to the hearts of those who came to greet Him.

Jesus prophesied that a day was coming when Jerusalem would be encircled by her enemies. They would destroy her and she would be levelled to the ground. Not one stone would be left on another. Her citizens would be killed. All this would happen to them because they did not recognize the time of God's coming to them (Luke 19:44). These events took place when Rome invaded Jerusalem several years later.

This passage challenges us in several areas. It reminds us that just as the Lord Jesus used a colt that had never been ridden so He can use us with our lack of experience and wisdom. We are challenged to surrender all we have without question like the owners of the colt. Jesus can do great things through us if we will surrender what we have to Him. Finally we see that the Lord Jesus is not fooled by the externals. He heard the praises of the citizens of Jerusalem but knew that these people were not committed to Him.

For Consideration:

- What encouragement do you receive here from the fact that the Lord Jesus can use an "inexperienced colt" to carry Him into the city of Jerusalem for the greatest work that was ever accomplished?
- Are you willing to surrender all you have to the Lord for His use?

- Take a moment to examine your heart. Are you like the crowd that cried out in praise of the Lord one moment and the next moment cried out for His crucifixion? Are you consistent in your walk with the Lord or are you influenced by people around you?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that while He understood what was ahead of Him in Jerusalem, He went anyway. Thank Him that He willingly surrendered all He had for you.
- Take a moment to commit all you have to the Lord. Ask Him to give you the grace not to hold anything back. Ask Him to use you in even greater ways.
- Ask the Lord to search your heart to see that you are sincere before Him. Ask Him to give you a faith that will stand firm despite the difficulties and persecutions that might come your way.



## 2

# THE SECOND CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

---

Read Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48

Jesus was now in to the city of Jerusalem. His days on earth would be brought to an end shortly. Here in this section He and His disciples went to the temple. When He arrived at the temple, Jesus noticed all the merchants who were buying and selling in the court. We need to understand the context of this incident.

The Jewish celebration of the Passover was approaching. People from all around were coming to Jerusalem for this important event. They came to bring an offering to God. Many people chose to buy an animal to sacrifice when they came to Jerusalem instead of taking it with them on the long journey. Because they came from distant places, their money needed to be exchanged so they could purchase the animals necessary for their sacrifices. This was the reason the temple was filled with merchants and money changers. They were offering a service to the people of God.

Most commentaries agree that this was the second time the Lord Jesus cleansed the temple. The first time He did so was also at the time of the Passover near the beginning of His ministry. We read about this in John 21:13-22. In this case, however, Jesus is at the end of His ministry just before He is crucified. What is striking is that things have not changed. The merchants were still cheating and stealing from the people of God in the temple. What would it have been like for the Lord to return to the temple and see the same thing happening all over again? The first cleansing of the temple did not seem to change anything. Established practices and traditions do not die easily.

What does the Lord want to cleanse in our church or in our lives today? There are sins that seem difficult to root out. Has the Lord been seeking to root out certain practices in your life that do not bring honour to His name? Notice that He comes back a second time. How many times must He come back and overturn the tables? How many times must He rebuke us and yet we do not listen?

When Jesus came into the temple area, His spirit was stirred to anger by what He saw. Immediately, He went over to the tables of the money changers and overturned them. Their money went flying through the air. He did the same with the benches of those who sold doves. The scene would have been chaotic. The doves would have been flying through the air and their owners running after them. The money changers would have been on their hands and knees gathering up the money that had been thrown from their tables. The crowd would have been rushing to see what the commotion was all about. There would have been a lot of noise and confusion. The meek and humble king who had entered into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey was now angry.

It is quite striking that as He came into Jerusalem as a king on a donkey's colt, the first order of business was to cleanse the temple. The crowd was filled with expectation when Jesus came into the city. They had cast their cloaks and branches down before him. They were expecting Him to set up His kingdom. They were expecting Him to deal with the Roman authorities. They were expecting Him to set them free from the oppression of the unbelieving Gentile rulers. Instead of dealing with the Roman oppressors He spoke to the hypocrisy and corruption in the temple.

How often have we cried out for revival in our nation? We have prayed for Him to come and set up His kingdom in our churches and in our land. We may be surprised at what He will do when He does come. We want to see the unbeliever come to Him. We want to see the terrible practices of our government stop. We want to see the crime rate go down. Jesus, however, addresses the hypocrisy and sin of His own people. We cry out for revival but are we ready for the Lord to place our lives under the microscope of His all-knowing eye?

Luke tells us that when Jesus came into the temple He drove out those who were selling. They were an obstacle to the blessing of the Father. This is what the Lord wants to do for us as well. He wants to drive out those things that keep us from deeper fellowship and intimacy. Notice the reason these individuals are driven out of the temple. Quoting from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, Jesus said:

My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers (Matthew 21:13).

Mark 11:16 tells us that Jesus would not let the merchants bring their goods into the temple area. Not only does He drive the evil out but He also stood guard to keep it out.

We need to understand that He will do the same for us. It is one thing to get rid of an evil habit or practice; it is another thing to keep that evil out of our lives. What we see here is that the one who can drive out this evil is also able to keep it out. Jesus stands guard. If we will trust Him, He can not only give victory for the moment; but He can keep you in that victory forever.

As we have mentioned above, when Jesus drove out the money changers and merchants He said, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers" (Matthew 21:13). There were two reasons why Jesus cast out the sellers and the money changers. First, He did so because His Father had declared the temple to be a place of prayer. The temple was a place where people could come to draw near to God and seek His face. These merchants had turned it into a marketplace. This was not the purpose of the temple. There were other places where they could buy and sell their goods. They were losing their focus. The place of prayer had become a place of profit. This upset the Lord.

The second reason for driving out the money changers and the sellers was because they had made the temple into a "den of robbers." This phrase would indicate that Jesus knew what was happening at the booths. He called the merchants and money changers, "robbers." This would indicate that they were cheating and robbing the people who had come to worship. This too upset Jesus. He reacted with anger. They were defiling the temple with their sinful and dishonest practices so He cast them out.

What Jesus did that day did not go over well with the priests and the teachers of the law. Both Mark and Luke tell us that they wanted to kill Jesus but they were afraid of the crowds.

Three things were accomplished by the cleansing of the temple that day.

The first result was that there was a new respect for the Word of God. Mark 11:18 tells us that the people were "amazed at His teaching." Luke 19:48 says that they "hung on to His words." Have you ever wondered why people are not interested in the Word of God? Could it be because of the hypocrisy they see all around them? Why should they listen to leaders who are not living according to the standards they teach? The people saw in Jesus a man who was sincere and did not hesitate to challenge their spiritual leaders.

The second result of the cleansing of the temple can be seen in Matthew 21:4. Matthew tells us that the blind and the lame came to Jesus at the temple and He healed them. When the evil was driven from the temple there was a release of powerful miracles in its place. Where the money changers used to be now the blind and the lame were standing. Where cheating and robbery took place now healing miracles were taking place. The power of God was released into the temple in a new way. Instead of pockets being filled with stolen money, the kingdom of God was being expanded as the blind and the lame were set free from the bondage of the enemy. The sin and evil in the temple only hindered the power of God. God is searching for a people who will be clean vessels for His power to flow. Sin will only rob us of that power.

The third result of the cleansing of the temple is found in Matthew 21:15-16. We are told that after these events children began to shout in the temple area: "Hosanna to the Son of David." Praise erupted on the lips of children. They began to shout with a loud voice and praise the Lord. Their noise was so loud that the chief priests were offended.

They were offended by what these children were saying. Jesus reminds them, however, of what the Psalmist prophesied in Psalm 8:2:

"From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger."

With the cleansing of the temple came a renewal of praise and worship. Children (the next generation) were touched by what they had seen. Sin will hinder our worship and praise. When the temple was cleansed, God's people were released to praise Him in a way they had never done before.

How important it is for us to recognize the effect of sin in our lives and in the life of our church. This passage calls us to examine our hearts to see that there is no obstacle to our worship and service of the Lord God.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the effect of sin in the church?
- Are there any sins that you need to deal with in your life today?
- What encouragement do we take from the fact that Jesus not only was able to drive out the evil in the temple but also to keep it out?

- What sins does the Lord need to drive out of your life?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to any sin in your life that He wants to deal with today.
- Thank the Lord that not only is He able to give you victory over sin but He is also able to keep you in that victory.
- Ask the Lord to do a wonderful cleansing work in your ministry and life.



### 3

## THE CURSED FIG TREE

---

Read Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14; 20-26

At this point in His ministry Jesus was staying in the region of Bethany and traveling to the city of Jerusalem to minister. On His way into the city on this particular occasion Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree by the side of the road and He went up to it looking for figs but there were only leaves. Mark tells us that it was not the season for figs (see Mark 11:13).

Despite the fact that it was not the season for figs, Jesus cursed the fig tree and said, "May you never bear fruit again" (Matthew 21:19). The tree immediately began to wither. The disciples were astonished at how quickly the tree had withered. Mark tells us that when they passed by that same area the next morning, the tree had withered from the root.

Jesus used what happened to the fig tree to teach His disciples a lesson on faith. He told them that they were not to be surprised at what they saw that day. If they had faith and did not doubt, they could not only do what was done

to this fig tree but they could speak to the mountain and tell it to cast itself into the sea and it would be done for them. If they believed, they would receive whatever they asked from God.

This is a very powerful statement that needs some consideration. Mark 11:23 tells us that we must believe that what we have prayed for is going to happen. More particularly, however, we need to see it as having already happened. We read in Mark 11:24:

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Notice that Jesus clearly said, "believe that you *have* received." The apostle John uses the same language in 1 John 5:14-15 when he says:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.

Notice the same type of wording here. John tells us that if we know He hears us, we know that we have what we have asked in faith. In both of these cases the request is already granted. The type of faith the Lord is calling us to have here is the type of faith that knows that what we have asked is already given to us because we asked.

How can we have this type of faith? The type of faith the Lord speaks of here is a special gift from God. There have been times when I have been given that gift of faith. As I

prayed, the Lord spoke to my heart and gave me the assurance that my request was heard and answered. On those occasions I could stop praying and walk away with assurance. There are other times when the assurance and faith we need comes from the clear teaching of the Word of God. God makes some clear promises in Scripture. I need to take His Word seriously and trust those promises. When God makes a clear promise in His Word we have no reason to doubt that promise and every reason to believe and be assured that He will be true and faithful to His word.

What Jesus says here does not mean that we can ask for anything we want and it will be done for us. Faith, received as a gift from God for our specific situation, is key to understanding this passage. Imagine what would happen if we could pray and have anything we wanted. Knowing human nature, one person would pray that the mountain be cast into the sea. Another would pray that it would be pulled up out of the sea and put in its proper place. One would curse the fig tree and another would restore it to life. There would be nothing but chaos.

To understand this passage, we need to understand that faith is the key. This is not a faith we stir up in ourselves. Nor is it a belief that God can do something if He wants. It is one thing to believe that the Lord is able to do what we ask of Him and quite another to know deep down in our heart that He will. The faith the Lord Jesus is speaking about here is not a faith that He can but a faith that He will. This type of faith is a gift from God given in a particular situation to those God wants to use to accomplish His special purposes. When God wants to do something, He will give someone the faith to pray that into being. Very often this type of faith is very specific. You may receive the faith necessary to do a specific task but not have it for another.

While faith is essential if we are going to receive the answer to our prayers, a lack of faith is not the only hindrance to prayer. In Mark 11:25, the Lord Jesus told His disciples that a broken relationship with a brother or sister in Christ could also keep them from receiving an answer to prayer. If they refused to forgive their brother or sister, then their heavenly Father would not forgive them. They could not expect to see great answers to prayers if they were not right with each other. There are some other important truths we cannot fail to see here in this story.

Notice that we are totally dependent on the Lord for all things. The disciples were amazed at how quickly the fig tree withered. In an instant, the leaves began to droop and its life drained out. What is true of the fig tree is true for us as well. We are absolutely dependent on the Lord Jesus for life, breath and fruit in our ministry. In an instant He could take all we have from us. Without His blessing our ministries and our lives would wither away to nothing. They would be fruitless and barren.

Notice also, that while it was not the season for figs, the Lord still cursed the fig tree because it had no fruit to offer Him when He came to it. There is no season for spiritual fruit. The Lord expects that we will bear fruit all the time. He expects that when He comes to us we will have fruit to offer Him for His refreshing.

Notice also that the Lord took away the ability of the fig tree to produce fruit because it was not producing a crop. Is it possible to lose what we have because we have not been faithful? Could it be that the Lord will remove us from our responsibilities if we are not being faithful with them? In Revelation 2 God told the church of Ephesus that He would remove their lamp stand because they had lost their

first love. What would stop Him from stripping us from our ministries if we are not faithful in using them for His glory?

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about our need of God's continued blessing in our lives and ministries?
- What gifts has God given you? Have you been faithful to use them for His glory?
- Have you had times in your life that God has given you specific faith for a task He has called you to do for Him? What was the result of this faith?
- What is the difference between the doctrine that believes that we can have anything we want and the doctrine the God gives us faith to accomplish all He wants?

For Prayer:

- What ministry has God called you to today? Ask God to give you the gift of faith that is necessary to accomplish that task for His glory?
- Thank the Lord for the authority He gives us as believers.
- Ask the Lord to help you to see His direction for your life and to enable you to be faithful in producing fruit for Him and His glory.



## 4

# CHRIST'S AUTHORITY CHALLENGED

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Read Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8

The Passover was near. People were gathering in Jerusalem. They were interested in what Jesus had to say. This did not go over well with the spiritual leaders who were looking for a way to kill Jesus. On this particular occasion, the Lord Jesus was teaching in the temple courts. The priests and the elders asked Him by what authority He was teaching and doing His work. Their intention was to call His authority into question. They wanted to show the crowd that Jesus was not acting under the authority of the established faith of the day but on His own.

Jesus knew what these leaders were doing. Instead of answering their question, He suggested that if they first answered His question He would answer theirs. He then asked them this question: "John's baptism--where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" (Matthew 21:25). This was a very important question. In asking this, Jesus brought the leaders back to the beginning of His

ministry. He reminded them of the day when John the Baptist introduced Him to the world. John made it clear that he believed Jesus to be the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world (see John 1:29). John baptized those who came to him telling them that they needed to confess their sins and be made right with God, ready for the coming of the Messiah. John had no doubt that Jesus was that Messiah.

There may have been a number of people present that day who had been baptized by John. Perhaps some of these religious leaders had also been baptized by John in preparation for the ministry of the Lord Jesus. John had also baptized Jesus. Many people had seen the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus like a dove when John baptized Him. They heard the voice of God saying that Jesus was His Son and they were to listen to Him.

Jesus was asking the religious leaders to consider the words of John the Baptist who preached that He was the Messiah. He was challenging them to listen again to the voice from heaven claiming Him to be the Son of God. He reminded them of the dove that rested on Him that day. Who commissioned Him to His ministry? As the leaders reflected on these things they would answer their own question. It should have been obvious that Jesus' authority came from God.

Many people accepted John as a true prophet of God. They believed what he said about the Lord Jesus. The spiritual leaders understood this. They understood that if they told Jesus, in the presence of these people, that John's ministry and baptism was from God then Jesus would ask them why they didn't believe Him and accept Him as the Messiah. If, on the other hand, they denied the ministry of John and said that it was merely of human

origin, then the people would be outraged. The religious leaders refused to answer Jesus' question. Jesus told them that He then would not answer their question about His authority to preach and teach.

There are some details we need to see here in this exchange between Jesus and the spiritual leaders. Jesus brings these spiritual leaders back to the beginning of His ministry. There are times when we, too, need to go back to the beginning. I have had times in my life when the enemy caused me to question my calling and authority. When we lived on the island of Mauritius there were times when the pressure of ministry became very intense. I was often forced to go back to the beginning and rehearse in my mind the call of God on my life. Throughout the Old Testament the Lord God called for special days and memorials to be set up. He did this to keep His call and promises fresh in the minds of His people. The Passover that Jesus came to celebrate that day was in remembrance of the deliverance of His people from the bondage of Egypt. God wanted them to keep this fresh in their minds. He calls us to remember His call, His promises and His faithfulness. As we do so, we are refreshed in our zeal to face the trials that come our way. When questioned about His authority, Jesus went back to His commissioning service and encouraged Himself in the call of God on His life.

The second thing we need to understand here is that when Jesus brings the spiritual leaders back to the ministry of John, He is reminding them of John's tragic death. John was killed because he spoke the Word of God. His death would have been very fresh in the minds of those present. The death of this great prophet at the hands of Herod would have sent shock waves through the Jewish community. It reminded them that even the true prophets of God sometimes have to lay down their lives. Jesus knew that

this would happen to Him. He knew that these spiritual leaders would kill Him like Herod had killed John.

What is particularly striking here is the response of the spiritual leaders. They were unwilling to stand up for what they believed. They were hindered by the people. There was not one among them who had the strength of conviction necessary to stand up for what he believed out of fear for the people. There are many spiritual leaders like this in our day. They preach what people want to hear. Even in Bible believing churches and ministries it is easy to preach messages that are comfortable and easy to accept. We dare not fall into the trap of these spiritual leaders in Jesus' day. They evaluated what they said by asking themselves first, "What will people think?" Have you ever been more concerned about what people think than about speaking the Word of God?

Satan changed His tactic when the spiritual leaders failed in their attempt to discredit Jesus. He chose instead to enter Judas, one of Jesus' disciples. He moved him to go to the chief priests and discuss with them how he could betray Jesus and deliver Him into their hands. Luke 22:5 tells us that the religious leaders were "delighted" to give Judas money to deliver Jesus over to them.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the temptation to preach or teach to please people? Have you ever struggled with this desire to please others?

- We see here that Jesus does not enter into controversy with the spiritual leaders. Are there times when it is best not to say anything?
- Has your ministry and calling ever been challenged? Are you doing what God called you to do? What encouragement do you find in the fact that Jesus' ministry was also called into question?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to set you free from the fear of what others think.
- Thank the Lord for the way He has called you and promised His provision and blessing in your life and ministry. Ask Him to refresh that calling in your mind and heart. Ask Him to give you greater zeal to do His will.



## 5

### THE TWO SONS

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Read Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus has been speaking to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They had come to the temple to question His authority. They wanted to undermine His influence and find a means to kill him.

Jesus saw their hypocrisy. They were a people whose only concern was their reputation. They were more concerned about what people thought than they were about the truth. They did a lot of talking and teaching about the law but they did not live in that truth themselves.

In Matthew 21, Jesus told a story about a man who had two sons. He went to the first of these sons and asked him to go to work for him in His vineyard. The son told his father that he would not work for him. He had his own plans and was not interested in what the father wanted him to do. In Jesus' day there were people like this son. The prostitutes, the tax collectors and the unbeliever made no attempt to put up a religious front. They openly proclaimed that they were not interested in the will and purpose of the Father.

They chose to live their sinful lifestyle in the open. They were like the first son who did not want to do the will of the father. Notice that the first son repented. He eventually came to understand that he was wrong and turned from His rebellion and went to the vineyard to work for the father.

The father had a second son. When he went to the second son and asked him to work, this son said he would. Notice the difference in the response here. The first son's words are harsh: "I will not." The second son says: "I will, sir." Notice the word "sir." This is a term of respect. This son, unlike the first, addresses His father with all the respect he was due. He uses the right words. To all outward appearance this second son is a loving, respectful and dutiful son.

While the second son showed all the signs of respect and honour, he did not do what he said he would. He chose to disregard the will of the father and did not go to the vineyard to work. His words said one thing but His actions another.

This second son was like the Pharisees and the religious leaders of the day. They knew the right words to say in their prayers. They knew the spiritual traditions of the fathers. They could teach the law and preach a sermon. They knew the liturgy and the customs but, like the second son, they did not do the will and purpose of the father.

When Jesus finished telling this parable He asked those present which of the sons did the will of the father. Everyone agreed that the first son did the will of the father by repenting and going to work. Jesus then applied the parable to the Pharisees by reminding them that the tax collectors and the prostitutes were entering the kingdom of

heaven ahead of them. All their religious traditions and talk did not make them right with God.

In Jesus' day, the prostitutes and sinners fell weeping at His feet confessing their sins. The tax collectors repented and gave back everything they had stolen from their customers. The religious leaders did nothing but condemn and seek to undermine His authority. It was the sinners who were accepting Him and entering the kingdom of heaven. The spiritual leaders could not get past their traditions.

Jesus had asked the spiritual leaders if the baptism of John was of God or of man. They could not answer Him. He reminded them that John came preaching and showing the way of righteousness. He did so by pointing the world to Jesus. The spiritual leaders of that day did not accept his message. The sinful tax collectors and prostitutes, however, did accept what John said and repented of their sin and believed in the Christ he preached.

Those who appeared to be spiritual on the outside were in reality the farthest from the Lord. It is often much more difficult to reach those who see themselves as religious than those who know they are sinners. God is not fooled by outward appearances. He sees beyond the talk. The passage challenges us to examine our hearts. Are we like the first son who repented and did the will of the father or are we like the second son who had all the outward appearance but did not live in obedience?

For Consideration:

- Which son are you like today?

- What does this passage teach us about the importance of acting on our faith and not just talking about it?
- What do we learn about the importance of repenting and making things right with God? Are you right with God today?
- Take a moment to examine your walk with God. Has your walk with Him been sincere? Have you been caught up in trying to please people like the religious leaders of Jesus' day?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be sincere not only in words but also in actions.
- Thank the Lord that He offers us an opportunity to repent like He did for the first son in this parable.
- Ask the Lord to move through your church and bring sincerity of heart and actions. Ask Him to remove hypocrisy.

## 6

# THE WICKED VINEYARD TENANTS

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Read Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19

In this section, the Lord Jesus told another parable. This parable spoke of how the spiritual leaders of that day would reject Him and His work. The parable is about a landowner who planted a vineyard. He placed a wall around it and dug a wine press to make wine. He also placed a watchtower in the vineyard to protect it from anything or anyone who would come to damage the vines. He rented the vineyard out to farmers and went away on a journey.

There are several things that we need to see in this parable. God, as the landowner has done everything to protect and insure a great harvest in His vineyard. He is interested in building His kingdom and has done everything for it to be built. He has empowered us by His Holy Spirit to do the work of the kingdom. He has promised to protect us and keep us as we do His work.

The second point we need to see is that the owner of the vineyard was expecting a harvest. It was for this reason he built a winepress. He expected that the vines would produce a harvest and that the time would come when the juice would be pressed out to make excellent wine. The Lord expects a harvest in our lives as well. He wants us to use the talents and gifts He has given us to produce great fruit for His kingdom.

When the time of the harvest approached, the owner of the vineyard sent His servants to the farmers who had been renting His land to collect the fruit. When the servants arrived, the tenant farmers beat one, killed a second and stoned the third (see Matthew 21:35).

Seeing what the tenants had done to His first servants, the owner sent more servants to speak to them. The response was the same. The land owner did this several times and each time the tenant farmers killed, beat or cast out those who were sent to them to collect the fruit of the vine.

When he saw what was happening, the owner decided to send his son. He felt that if they did not respect his servants, surely they would respect his son who came with his full authority.

When the tenant farmers saw the son coming they said among themselves, "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance." They killed the son.

The parable related to the people of Israel. The Lord God gave them a land. He called them to be His servants. As His servants they were to produce spiritual fruit for Him. When they were not producing fruit, the Lord God sent His prophets. They stoned, cast out or killed the prophets God

sent. When they would not listen to His prophets, God sent His son, the Lord Jesus. They would kill Him too.

Notice how these tenant farmers began to feel that they were in control of the land and deserved the fruit themselves. They forgot that they were tenants. How easy it is for us to fall into this trap. We forget that all we have has been loaned to us by God. We resent the fact that the Lord asks for a return on what He has given us. At best we are tenant farmers caring for a land and a life that is not ours. We need to keep this in focus.

Jesus told His listeners what the owner of the vineyard would do to the evil tenants. He would judge them severely and strip them of their right to the land and give the land to those who would produce a crop.

This verse is very powerful. It shows us the importance of being faithful with the gifts and possessions the Lord has given us. If we do not use the gifts and resources God has given, He will find someone who will but we will miss out on the reward and the blessing.

The people present that day heard what Jesus said and responded in Luke 20:16 by saying, "May it never be." They understood enough to know that Jesus was saying that they could lose their privilege as the chosen people of God. Jesus reminded them, however, of what the Psalmist had prophesied. Quoting from Psalm 118:22-23 He said:

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.

The Psalmist prophesied that the day was coming when his people would reject the very stone on whom the

kingdom of God would be built. Long before it happened, the Psalmist prophesied that his people would reject the Messiah. Jesus told those present that whoever fell on the rejected stone would be broken to pieces but the one on whom it fell would be ground to powder. We need to examine this statement more closely.

Jesus, as the chief corner stone, would be a stumbling block for many. In His day, many people could not understand how He could be the Messiah. While the sinners around them were opening their hearts to the Lord Jesus and experiencing His victory, the Jewish leaders were stumbling over Him to their own hurt.

Jesus was not only a stumbling block but He will one day be our judge. This Great Corner Stone will one day fall on those who reject Him. When He falls on them on the Day of Judgment they will be crushed and destroyed. Jesus used this passage to warn His listeners of the danger of rejecting Him.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard this parable they knew Jesus was speaking about them. They knew He was claiming to be the Messiah. They knew He was warning them that they would be judged because they had rejected God's offer through Him. The kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to someone else because they had not produced fruit. These words offended them deeply. They would have arrested Him right there but they did not want to upset the people, so they left Him alone.

This passage is a challenge to us in several ways. First it reminds us that we need to be faithful with what God has given. What guarantee do we have that the Lord will not

take from us what He has given us if we have not been faithful?

Second, the passage reminds us that all we have is loaned to us. We are merely tenant farmers caring for what is not ours. We are to use the resources under our care for the kingdom of God.

Finally, we need to understand that to reject Jesus, like the spiritual leaders in this passage, is a serious matter. We dare not turn our back on Him. Those on whom He falls in judgment will be crushed.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about God's right to all we have? Have you ever struggled to return to God what is already His?
- What gifts and talents has the Lord given you? Why is it important that we be faithful in using these gifts for Him?
- Why is it such a dangerous thing to turn our back on the Lord Jesus?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be faithful in the use of our gifts and talents for His glory.
- Thank the Lord that He has chosen to use you to advance His kingdom in this world.

- Do you know the Lord as your Saviour today? Thank Him that you have been saved from His judgment.
- Do you know someone on whom the Corner Stone will one day fall in judgment? Ask the Lord to open the eyes of their heart to Him.

## THE WEDDING FEAST

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Read Matthew 22:1-14

The crowd has been wondering when the Lord Jesus would set up His kingdom. Their concept of the kingdom of God was very different from the kingdom Jesus was going to set up. In this parable Jesus explains some things about the nature of the kingdom He had come to setup.

Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a wedding banquet. A certain king prepared a banquet for His son. The king sent out His servants to invite guests to the banquet. The prophets of the Old Testament were like those who went out to invite the people of God to Him and to the rich salvation He offered.

The invitation to the banquet was not well received. The invited guests refused to come. The Jews of Jesus' day refused to accept Him as their Messiah.

Seeing that the invited guests refused to come to His banquet, the king sent other servants in order to persuade them to come. He told them that the oxen and the fatted

cattle had been killed and everything was ready. All they needed to do was to come and enjoy the feast. Again, however, the guests refused the invitation. Some of those who were invited seized the servants, mistreated and killed them. This is what the Jewish nation did to the prophets God sent.

The king was enraged. He sent His army to destroy those who had murdered His servants. That army burned down their city. In the Old Testament we see that the nations of Assyria and Babylon destroyed the nation God gave to His people and burned the city of Jerusalem.

The king then told His servants that they were to go into the streets and invite anyone they could find. The banquet was prepared and it would not be wasted.

The servants went into the streets and gathered all the people they could find. In the end, the wedding hall was filled with guests enjoying the banquet. People from all backgrounds were present. Likely there were those who had come out of a background of prostitution and crime alongside those who had lived good, moral and religious lives. They all sat together at the table enjoying the banquet. The Lord reaches out to all kinds of people. He invites us all to come. You may have a terrible reputation in your community. You may have lived a terrible lifestyle. You are still invited to come to the banquet. He will accept you if you come.

As the king watched His guests, he noticed a man who was not wearing wedding clothes. He approached the man and said, "Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" (Matthew 22:12). The man said nothing.

Seeing that the man had nothing to say, the king ordered that he be tied hand and foot and thrown outside into the darkness where there would be great suffering and pain.

There are some important details we need to see here. While the banquet was free to all who would accept the invitation there was still a requirement. All who came to that banquet needed to wear their wedding garment. What is this wedding garment? The wedding garment is a symbol of forgiveness and devotion to the groom. Those who come to the banquet must be forgiven of their sins. They must wear the robe of the righteousness of Christ. They must accept the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross and be covered by His work. The wedding guests will come from all walks of life but they all have one thing in common. They are forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Jesus and covered by His righteousness.

There was an individual at the banquet who was not clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He was not a true believer. He was a hypocrite. He had no right to be at that banquet. It should not surprise us to find people in our midst who are not true believers. Many of them have deceived themselves into thinking that they are good Christians. They do not depend, however, on the work of Christ. Their trust and confidence is in their own works and efforts.

Jesus concluded this parable with the statement that many are invited but few are chosen. The invitation went out to the guests but they refused to come. Not everyone who is invited to come to the Lord Jesus will accept His offer. There are, however, those that God has specially called to Himself. I am thankful that God did not give up on me. He pursued me until He won my heart. He had a special purpose for my life from the very beginning of time. He called me to know Him and serve Him in a special way. Jesus

distinguishes here between the general invitation that goes out to all people and the specific work of God in the hearts and lives of those He has called to Himself.

Maybe you have experienced this specific calling of the Lord in your life. It is much deeper than a general invitation. The Spirit of God has worked in your heart to convict you of sin. You have no peace until you fall in line with His purpose. While a general invitation goes out to all people, there is a very specific and personal work of God's Spirit in the lives of some. I don't pretend to understand why the Spirit of God would personally and specially work in me to convict and bring me to Christ. I don't deserve His special attention any more than anyone else. All I know is that God's Spirit came especially to me and would not let me go until He had won my heart and I will forever be grateful that He called on me in this way.

How easy it is to deceive ourselves. Many are dressed in the garments of good works. They are wearing the perfume of good intentions. They understand the truth of the Gospel and cannot be faulted in their doctrine. They are faithful and godly people. The garments of godly living, good doctrine, and good intentions are not enough. If you are not wearing the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness you have no right in this banquet hall. You may have given yourself to doing all you can for God and His kingdom. You look at those present in that banquet hall and see many who have lived lives of crime and immorality. You ask yourself why these individuals should be allowed in the banquet hall when you are refused entrance. The answer is simple. They are trusting in what Christ has done for them and not in what they have done for Him. They are dressed in the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness. His blood covers their sin and unworthiness. They have

accepted His forgiveness and are trusting in Him and not themselves.

There is just one more thing I want to mention in relation to this parable. It has often been difficult for me to understand how this individual was able to get into the wedding banquet. Let me speak briefly about this before concluding.

First, the Lord often reminds us in His teaching on the Kingdom of God that before He returns there will always be those who are disguised as true believers. The wheat will have to grow together with the weeds (Matthew 13:25-30). The wolves will circulate with the sheep (Matthew 7:15). There will be shepherds whose only concern is in themselves (Jude 12). We need to be aware of this reality in our battle for righteousness. Until Satan is cast into the pit, he will do His best to infiltrate the church with his people.

Second, who among us can say that there are no issues or strongholds that need to be addressed in our own lives? There will be times when we will have to deal with our own sins as the king dealt with the man without a wedding garment. Not every thought is clothed in the wedding garment of righteousness. Not every attitude is inspired by the Holy Spirit. We all have to search our own hearts and lives and ask the Lord to cast out those things that do not bring glory and honour to His name. Until Jesus returns, we will have to do battle with sin in our churches and personal lives.

This parable was directed to the Jews who had refused His invitation. Jesus was telling them that He would turn His attention to others. He would open the door for the Gentiles to come to him. How thankful we need to be that the door has swung open for you and me today.

## For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about the hardness of human hearts?
- What do we learn about how impossible it is to enter heaven by our good works and attitudes?
- What does Jesus teach us about the nature of the church on this earth? Will it be perfect?
- What do we see here about the importance of searching our own hearts and lives to be sure we belong to Him?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to search your heart and life to see if there is anything that needs to be cast out.
- Thank the Lord that it is not on the basis of our own works that we merit a place in the banquet. Thank Him that His righteousness and forgiveness is all we need.
- Take a moment to thank the Holy Spirit that He specifically worked in your heart and life to bring you to Christ. Thank the Father that He specifically called you to Himself.
- Ask the Lord to soften the hearts of your friends and loved ones who do not know Him so that they accept the Lord's invitation to come to Him.

## 8

### PAYING CAESAR

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Read Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26

The Pharisees were not in agreement with Jesus' teaching, and they often tried to trap Him into saying something wrong. One day they asked Him whether it was proper to pay taxes to Caesar. None of the Jews liked paying taxes. If Jesus spoke in favour of the tax He would likely lose the support of those who hated the taxes the Romans imposed on them. If, on the other hand, Jesus taught that they should not pay taxes, the Pharisees would have reason to accuse Him before the Romans. Luke 20:20 makes this quite clear.

Notice that the Pharisees sent their disciples along with some Herodians to speak to Jesus. The Herodians were sympathetic to the government of Rome. They believed that the Jews needed to submit to Rome and pay their taxes. Jesus would have offended them if He said that the Jews were not to pay taxes.

There was deception in their words as they approached Jesus in Matthew 22:16:

Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. (Matthew 22:16)

These leaders gave the impression that they were coming to Him because they valued His opinion and teaching. The truth, however, was that they were looking for a reason to have Him killed.

Jesus saw through their intentions. He was not deceived by their words. "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?" He asked (Matthew 22:18). He asked them to show Him the coin used for paying taxes. Someone brought Him a denarius. Jesus then asked them whose inscription was on the coin. They told Him that Caesar's portrait and inscription was on it. Jesus told them to give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar and to God what belonged to God. When they heard this answer they were silenced.

Those who came to Jesus were from two groups. The Herodians believed that the hope for the Jews was in Caesar. The Pharisees believed that the Jews needed to resist Rome and put their hope in God (although they rejected His Son). Notice how these two parties join forces against Jesus. Normally they would not have worked together but they had a common desire to get rid of Him.

Jesus reminded them that they also had an obligation to God. They were obligated to God to be honest and sincere in their own hearts. When Jesus told them to give to God what was His they did not dare pursue this. Their attitude toward Jesus showed that they were not giving God the respect and honour He deserved.

Jesus continually silenced those who came to trap Him. He did not enter into their futile discussions. The real issue was not whether one should pay taxes to Caesar but the condition of the heart of those who tried to trap Him. When He spoke directly to this issue, the enemy was silenced. How often we get distracted into senseless arguments and debates. Jesus did not fall into this trap. While Jesus could have used this occasion to teach a lesson on our responsibility to government, He knew this was not the issue that brought the Pharisees to Him that day. The real issue was hearts filled with hatred, jealousy and pride. Jesus challenged the Pharisees on this by calling them not only to give to Caesar what was His but also to give to God the respect and honour He deserved by dealing with the evil in their own hearts.

#### For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about our obligation to the government that God has placed over us?
- Have you ever fell into the trap of trying to prove your point and not listening to the leading of the Holy Spirit? How does Jesus speak to the real issue in the lives of those who came to trap Him?
- How important is it that we be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and discerning of the real issues in people's lives?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be more sensitive to His leading in your conversations with others.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have put your own interests and ideas ahead of His leading.
- Ask God to give you greater discernment to know when you need to speak and when you need to be quiet.

## 9

# QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESURRECTION

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Read Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40

The religious leaders of the day repeatedly tried to find a means of accusing Jesus. On this occasion the Sadducees came to Jesus with a question about the resurrection. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. It appears that the reason they ask this question was to make Him and His doctrine look foolish in front of the people.

Their question is rather complicated. They begin by reminding Jesus about how the Law of Moses taught that if a man died without a child His brother was to marry His widow and have a child with her for His brother. This law is found in Deuteronomy 25:5-6:

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, His widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfil the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the

name of the dead brother so that His name will not be blotted out from Israel.

This law was given by Moses out of compassion for the families of Israel. In order that the family name would continue, Moses commanded that the brother of the man who died should take the widow and care for her as his own wife. The first child born of this union would belong to the deceased brother and carry on his name.

The Sadducees presented Jesus with an imaginary situation about a man who married a woman and died without a child. There were seven brothers. Each of them married this widow and died without being able to give her a child. The Sadducees ask Jesus whose wife this woman would be at the resurrection since she was married to all of the brothers.

The intention of the Sadducees was to make the doctrine of the resurrection look foolish. You can imagine the confusion in heaven as each of these men claimed that the widow was His wife. The Sadducees felt that they had really trapped Jesus with this question.

Jesus told them that they neither understood the Scriptures nor the power of God. We need to examine these two statements here.

First, Jesus reminded the Sadducees that they did not understand the Scriptures. Jesus told them that in the resurrected life there will be no marriage. Marriage is only for this world. In heaven we will not be married. While we will be joined with those we love, we will no longer be married to them. The passage has always challenged me. If I am going to make something of my marriage, I cannot wait until I get to heaven. Marriage was instituted by God as a

means of mutual support and encouragement for this life. We will not be married in heaven.

Second, Jesus reminded the Sadducees that the Scriptures taught that God was not the God of the dead but of the living. Though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were long dead, God still declared Himself to be their God. If God was not the God of the dead then how could He continue to declare Himself to be the God of Abraham even after Abraham had died? The only way that God could continue to call Himself the God of Abraham was if Abraham was in some way still alive. Abraham was in the presence of God. Thus there had to be a resurrection.

The Sadducees were silenced by what Jesus said that day. The crowds also were astonished at this teaching. No one dared ask Him any more questions. They were no match for His wisdom.

Not only did the Sadducees not understand the Scriptures but Jesus also told them that they did not understand the power of God. What did Jesus mean by this? The Sadducees came to Jesus with what they felt was a real problem. What kind of confusion would there be in heaven if these seven men were all fighting over the same woman? Somehow the Sadducees felt that God would not be able to deal with this sort of confusion. Nor did they understand the power of God that could even raise the dead and give them life again.

Jesus pitied the Sadducees. They did not understand the power of God. The God of heaven was the God who formed the universe. He had ordered all things. Not a single bird fell to the ground outside of His will (Matthew 10:29). He was an all-powerful and all-knowing God. Did these Sadducees think that such a God would overlook

such a simple matter? Did they feel that He could care for the universe and not have a solution for these seven men? The Sadducees did not see the solution and so they wondered if there even was one.

How often have we fallen into this trap? We can't see a way out. We can't understand the solution. We don't understand how God could ever work our problem and situation out. We begin to lose hope. Again the voice of Jesus speaks: "You do not understand the power of God." The hands that formed the universe will also unfold His plan for your life. The answer that Jesus gave was so simple. The crowds were amazed. Their doubts were silenced.

#### For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about marriage and the purpose of marriage?
- How has your marriage partner been an encouragement to you in your walk with the Lord? How have you been a blessing to your partner?
- What is the challenge of this passage to us who are married about making our marriage work here below?
- What do we learn in this passage about the power of God in our problems and difficulties? Have you ever doubted God's power? What encouragement do you receive from this passage?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is in control of all things in our life and that nothing is impossible for him.
- If you are married, take a moment to thank the Lord for your spouse. Ask God to help you to be an encouragement and support to him or her.



# 10

## THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

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Read Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34

The religious leaders of the day were trying to trap Jesus, but He consistently silenced them. The Sadducees had just asked Him a question about the resurrection. Hearing His answer, they regrouped to plan another attack.

One of the experts in the law approached Jesus with another question. "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law," (Matthew 22:36) he asked. Matthew 22:35 makes it clear that this question was designed to test Jesus. It is important for us to note that the individuals asking the questions were not particularly concerned about understanding truth. Their goal was to get rid of Jesus or discredit Him before the people.

Without hesitating, the Lord Jesus answered by telling them that the greatest commandment of all was to love the Lord with all one's heart, soul and mind. This, according to Jesus, was the first and greatest of all the commandments.

The commandment can be found in Deuteronomy 6:5. The second greatest commandment, Jesus told them, was to love their neighbour as themselves. This commandment is found in Leviticus 19:18.

According to Jesus, the teaching of the Law and the Prophets could be summarized by these two laws. We need to examine this in greater detail.

Jesus told the religious leaders of His day that they were to love the Lord their God with all their hearts. The heart is not only the organ that pumps blood through our body and keeps us alive but the heart has come to be understood as the seat of the emotions and passions. We speak of a broken heart and refer to emotions that have been wounded. The heart is also a place where we treasure those things that are important to us. Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 6:21 when He says:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

When Jesus told the religious leaders that they were to love the Lord with all their hearts He was telling them that they were to place Him in their hearts as the most important treasure they had. Notice here that Jesus said they were to love Him with "all" their hearts. If we love Him with all our heart everything else takes second place. Our joys and desires are found in Him. Everything else falls short and fails to stir our heart as He does.

The heart, as we said, is also the seat of emotions. My feelings and my emotions come into play in my relationship with God. My love for God is much more than just a lifeless commitment to honour His Word. There is a real stirring of my heart and emotion toward him.

Notice second, that Jesus told these leaders that they were to love God with all their souls. The heart beats and pumps blood but the soul is life itself. It is what makes me different from a machine. A machine can imitate the functions of the human body. A computer can be created to reproduce human thought but the computer is not alive. When God created human beings, He breathed into them the breath of life. That breath is the soul of man. It is that soul that will live forever.

When Jesus told the religious leaders of His day to love Him with all their souls He was telling them that their very life was to be dedicated and devoted to Him. He was telling them that their relationship with Him went deeper than emotions and outward actions. Their relationship of love with God went to the very core of who they were as individuals. It went as deep as the breath of life. When our relationship with God goes as deep as the soul, it affects every part of our being. It is so much part of us that we can no longer separate our love for God from who we are. This love for God is so deeply rooted in our lives and beings that we can no longer define who we are apart from it. It has penetrated into every corner. It affects everything we do and defines who we are. We understand who we are only through this love relationship with God.

Third, Jesus told the people that they were to love Him with all their minds. The mind is the place of reason and understanding. It is also the place of thoughts and imaginations. It is important that we understand that our love for God cannot be separated from reason and understanding. The love that Jesus spoke about here involves reason, thought and understanding. You cannot separate your love for God from your study of God and His Word. If you want to love God you need to understand who He is. You need to search the Scriptures and let them teach you about His

character and will. You need to let the Holy Spirit be your teacher and bring understanding and clarity to your mind about the person of the Lord Jesus and His plan and purpose for this world. Your worship must be fuelled by careful teaching that involves your mind and understanding. He who understands best worships best. Our love is fuelled by what we understand about God. When we understand what He has done and who He is, our hearts are stirred to deeper love and devotion.

There is also another aspect to this. When we love God with all our minds there is no room for anything in our mind that is not in tune with God and His purposes. Wrong attitudes are cast out. When we love God with all our minds, there is no room for lustful and evil thoughts. Our minds are devoted to the Lord and His purposes alone.

The second greatest commandment, according to Jesus, is to love our neighbour as ourselves. When we love our neighbour as ourselves we place their interests above our own. When our neighbour is in need we reach out to Him as if it were our own need. I must treat my wife, my children, my relatives and my fellow human beings as I would treat myself.

How easy it is for us to think only about our own needs. Try spending an entire day only thinking about the needs of others and you will see how difficult it is to keep your mind off yourself. When we love our neighbour as ourselves we no longer compete with them. We feel what they feel. We make their pain our pain and their joy our joy. We rejoice with them when they are lifted up and honoured. We do not feel jealous or envious but are happy for them. Imagine what type of a world this would be if we could actually live this way.

Jesus reminded the religious leaders in this passage that all Scripture (Law and Prophets) has love for God and neighbour as its central focus. Jesus came to restore a relationship of love with God. He came to restore us in our relationship with each other. The central message of the Scriptures is love. It is a message of how the Lord God reached down to sinful human beings to bring them into a relationship with Himself. It is a message of reconciliation and renewal in relationship with each other.

Those who listened to what Jesus taught that day were powerfully touched. They had come to trap Jesus but they were challenged and convicted by His words. His words were filled with wisdom and understanding of the purpose and plan of God. The teacher who came with this question to trap Jesus Himself was touched by what He heard and replied in Mark 12:32-33:

Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love Him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.

When Jesus heard this teacher, He was touched. He saw sincerity in his heart. Jesus reminded him that he was not far from the kingdom of heaven.

I find it amazing that when asked what the greatest thing we could possibly do for God was, Jesus responded by telling His listeners that they were to love Him with everything they had. More than all our service, church attendance and doctrinal correctness, God wants a relationship of love with us. The question is again asked today: "What

is the greatest thing we can do for God?" The answer is the same. "Love Him with all you have."

For Consideration:

- What is the central message of the Scripture according to Jesus?
- What does it mean to love God with all our heart? What is the role of emotions in our love for God?
- What does it mean to love God with all our soul?
- What does it mean to love God with all our mind? What is the role of understanding and teaching in our love for God?
- What does it mean to be a Christian according to this passage?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to search your heart to see where your love for Him is weakest (heart, soul or mind). Ask Him to strengthen you in this area of your love.
- Thank the Lord for the way He desires to enter into such a personal and intimate relationship with you.

# 11

## JESUS, THE SON OF DAVID

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Read Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44

The Pharisees could not accept that the Lord Jesus was the Messiah. They did everything in their power to prove Him wrong. They tested Him with all kinds of questions in order to trap Him. They wanted Him to die because He claimed to be the Son of God. Knowing their intentions, Jesus asked them a question about King David.

Matthew tells us that the Pharisees were gathered around Him when He asked this question. This question seemed to be directed to the Pharisees in particular. "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" Jesus asked. The word Christ means "anointed one." When He spoke of "Christ" in this context, Jesus spoke about the Messiah of whom the Old Testament prophets spoke.

Without hesitation the Pharisees told Jesus that the Christ was to be the Son of David. This was a well understood fact in that day. The prophets made it clear that from the seed of David there would come a deliverer for the people of Israel (see Isaiah 9:6-7; 55:2-5).

Jesus asked the Pharisees what the prophets meant when they said that the Christ was the "son" of David. Again the question was fairly easy to answer. The Messiah was the "son" of David in that He was to be a descendant of David. He would live among men and walk with them. As a son, He would be born of a woman and face all that we face as human beings. He would grow and mature like any other man facing the temptations and trials of this earth. He would be able to identify with us in all things because He shared our humanity.

This doctrine of the Christ being the son of David was something that the Pharisees and the Jews often overlooked. They expected to see someone different. Jesus came as a simple man. He came quietly. For the most part, He was not noticed. Very often the answers to our prayers are right before us but we do not see them or accept them because they do not look the way we expect them to look. Jesus did not look like the "Messiah" the Pharisees expected.

Jesus then asked the Pharisees another question: "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls Him 'Lord'?" (Matthew 22:43). In the context of these times, a son was to respect His father. It would be unthinkable for the son to require His father to submit to him. In the case of the Christ, however, though He was a "son" He was called "Lord" by David who was His father. To prove His point Jesus quoted from Psalm 110:1 in Matthew 22:43:

The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."

Jesus asked the Pharisees how it could be that David would call one of His own "sons" Lord. The only way that he could call Him Lord was if that son was greater than him

and more deserving of respect and honour than him. Jesus brings up an important point here. He paints a picture of lordship and sonship walking hand in hand. The Pharisees were looking for a "Lord" but they failed to see the "Son." Jesus is both Lord and Son. Very often we emphasize one without the other. There are some churches that place such an emphasis on "lordship" that they fail to see His "sonship." These churches see Christ as distant and removed. He is to be worshipped and honoured but He does not really identify on an intimate and personal level with us. Others emphasize the "sonship" and fail to see His lordship. Those who fall into this category can fail to see the importance of obedience and submission. Jesus becomes a "friend and buddy" but He is not seen clearly as Lord and God. We need to keep these two qualities in balance. As Lord, Jesus demands and requires obedience and submission. As Son, He identifies with us personally. He weeps with us and feels our pain. He knows what we are going through because He has been through these things himself. As a son He is our brother. As Lord He is our God. To understand Him correctly is to hold these two qualities in balance.

Jesus reminded the Pharisees that the Christ, as Son, would look like them. He would have all the qualities and characteristics of a human being, yet He was God. He was reminding them that the Messiah had to be born as a baby and grow up to be a man. He had to rub shoulders with others His age and walk among them as a man.

When the Pharisees heard this teaching they had nothing to say. The words of Jesus challenge us too. They challenge us to open our eyes to the way the Lord is working. His work is often quiet and unnoticed. These words also challenge us to see Jesus as both Lord and Son. As a son He came in humility, unnoticed by people. He suffered

what we suffer. As God, He is all powerful and deserving of respect and honour. This combination of Lord and Son is not always easy to understand. The all-powerful and holy God identifies with us and suffers what we suffer. At the same time, however, He is our example and hope. In His strength we can face all that this world throws at us. He is our brother and our God.

#### For Consideration:

- Could it be that the Lord has already answered your prayer but you have not seen it because you are looking for something different?
- What does it mean that Jesus is Lord? How does this affect our own walk with Him?
- What encouragement do you received from the idea of the "sonship" of Jesus?
- Why is it important for us to understand the balance between the lordship and sonship of Christ?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to the way He answers your prayer.
- Thank the Lord that He is "Lord." Ask Him to reveal to you any area where you have not been living in submission to Him.

- Thank the Lord for His "sonship" and that He can identify with you in your pain and struggle.



# 12

## WOE TO THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

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Read Matthew 23:1-39; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47

Jesus had been speaking very directly to the Pharisees. They appeared to be holy and spiritual but in reality they were hypocrites. Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and often spoke out against it. In this next section, He told the crowds to beware of the Pharisees and their ways. We can imagine the response of the Pharisees to these words of Jesus.

It may be hard to imagine a religious group like the Pharisees being a threat to the people of God. They took pride in their observance of the Law of Moses. They were faithful in their religious duties. They were teachers of the Law of Moses and had the respect and admiration of the people of their day. Jesus saw them in a different light. He saw their legalism, manipulation and pride as being very dangerous. They came across as spiritual but they rejected Jesus and His teaching. They were leading people away from the Lord and into religion and legalism. People were

easily deceived by them because of this religious appearance. There are Pharisees in our day as well. They keep people busy with religious activity but they do not lead them to the Lord Jesus. They teach that if you do the right things you can please God. They present a religion that has no need of Jesus and His work on the cross.

Jesus reminded the people that the teachers of the law sat in Moses' seat. That is to say, they sat in the place of those who interpreted the Scriptures and the Law of God. They were teachers and enforcers of the law. They had a position of honour and respect in the community but they did not do what the Law required. Jesus told the crowd to obey the teaching of the Pharisees but not to imitate their lives.

The Pharisees tied up heavy loads and put them on the backs of others but they were not willing to lift a finger to move those loads themselves. How important it is for us who teach the Word of God to be sure that we live what we preach? We dare not condemn others for those things we ourselves do not practice. It is easy to teach but quite another thing to demonstrate in our personal lives the things we teach. The Pharisees, like so many church leaders, were good at teaching but not so good at demonstrating what they taught.

As Jesus looked at the Pharisees He saw a people who had devoted themselves to ministry but they did so for the wrong motives. They were seeking the praises of their fellow human beings. They wanted people to notice them, like them and respect them. This was particularly obvious in how the Pharisees dressed.

Mark and Luke tell us that the Pharisees wore long flowing robes. Matthew tells us that they specifically made the tassel of their garments long (Matthew 23:5). There was no

practical reason for this. They did so only to be noticed. Somehow they believed that by wearing these clothes, people would respect them and listen to what they had to say. They believed that they had an image to maintain. That image did not have anything to do with their heart. It was merely external.

Notice also that Matthew 23:5 tells us that the Pharisees made their phylacteries wide. The phylactery was a small leather pouch containing Scripture passages that was worn on the forehead. While it was customary for the religious leader to wear this phylactery, what is striking is that the Pharisees made these phylacteries larger than normal. They made them big so that people would see them.

The Pharisees loved places of honour in banquets and were always delighted to sit in the most important seats (Matthew 23:6). They wanted to be greeted in the market-places and loved to be popular with people. They had people call them "Rabbi," which meant master or teacher. In contrast, Jesus was called a friend of sinners. Isaiah 53:2 describes Him in this way:

He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.

Jesus told the crowds not to call anyone "rabbi," or "father" because they only had one "Rabbi" and "Father" who was in heaven. Nor were they to call anyone "teacher" because Christ alone was their teacher. Let's look at this statement in more detail.

What does Jesus mean when He says that we are not to call anyone rabbi, teacher or father? We need to see what

Jesus says in the context of the rest of the Scripture. After making this statement about not calling anyone teacher, Jesus Himself spoke of the Pharisees as teachers (see Matthew 23:13). If Jesus calls them teachers, what is meant in this verse? The Lord God has given to the church various gifts and offices. The offices of teacher, prophet and pastor have been ordained of God for the building up of the body. Ephesians 4:11-12 make this quite clear:

It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

It is not wrong to recognize these gifts in the body of Christ. We also need to respect and honour those who have been given such offices in the church today. It does not seem to be wrong to call a person "teacher" (rabbi) or "pastor" if that is His role in the body of Christ. The apostles often spoke of teachers and pastors. In 2 Timothy 1:11, Paul calls himself an apostle and a teacher.

The focus of this verse is not on the title but the attitude. Notice in this passage that the Pharisees wanted others to call them "teacher" and "rabbi." The idea here is that these individuals were being caught up in their title. The title meant more to them than the office. Jesus speaks against a system that elevates titles. He speaks out against those who are power hungry and thirsty for attention and admiration. He speaks out against those who seek position so that people will think highly of them. He cautions us against falling in the trap of not only seeking attention but actually allowing people to demand such attention.

Jesus went on to address this issue of glory seeking. He told His listeners that instead of demanding that others call them "rabbi" or "teacher" and doing everything to be noticed, they were to be content to be servants. This is how Jesus ministered. He didn't seek the praise of people around Him. He became a servant. He did not demand that people call Him teacher and master. He was not looking for their hollow praise and admiration.

Jesus went on to say that those who exalted themselves before men would be humbled. If on the other hand, they humbled themselves they would be exalted. The Pharisees had established a "religious holy club." They did not want to associate with the average person. They saw themselves as being more important than anyone else. They wanted the title and the admiration. This same problem exists all over the world today. There are pastors and religious leaders who want to place themselves above others. They crave attention. They demand to be treated with more dignity and respect than the average believer in their church. Somehow they feel that having a title makes them more important. This pride needs to be broken.

These Pharisees hindered the work of God. Far from being valuable servants in the kingdom, they were its enemies. Matthew 23:13 tells us that the Pharisees were shutting people out of the kingdom of heaven by their example and teaching. Their proud attitude and hypocrisy were turning people away from God.

The Pharisees were full of energy and zeal. They won converts to their beliefs but their converts were no better than them. Their converts were also caught up in legalism and attention seeking. Jesus told the crowd that some of the converts the Pharisees were making were worse than the Pharisees themselves. These were powerful words from

the lips of Jesus. He literally calls the religious Pharisees, "sons of hell."

Jesus spoke openly about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees of His day. In Matthew 23:16, He called them blind guides. In other words, they lead people but they did not know the way themselves. They would tell people that it was acceptable for them to swear by the temple and not keep their oath but if they swore by the gold of the temple they were bound to keep their oath. They taught that a person could swear by the altar and not keep His oath but if he swore by the gift on the altar he was honour bound to keep that oath. What they were doing was trying to find ways of getting out of their promises. Instead of letting their word stand, they found all kinds of silly ways to pull out of a promise when things did not work to their advantage. They would manipulate and reinterpret the Law of Moses to suit their needs.

In Matthew 23:23, Jesus spoke of how the Pharisees gave one tenth of their spices and garden seeds. When it came to this aspect of the law, they were very precise and legalistic. Jesus accused them, however, of neglecting the more important matters of the law. They gave one-tenth of their dill and cumin seeds but they neglected justice, mercy and faithfulness. Jesus did not condemn them for their giving, but challenged them to make these other matters a priority in their lives.

I have seen churches that were so strict about certain rules and regulations that they could not show mercy or compassion to those who broke them. Instead of drawing the offender back to the Lord, their harshness and critical attitudes drove them further away. Jesus compared this to straining the gnat and swallowing the camel. In other

words, they had their priorities all wrong. They were big on the little things but neglected the big things.

We too can act like these Pharisees. There are many "gnats" in the church today. Small theological issues or differences in practices divide us. I once visited a small rural community in Canada where there were five or six small churches of the same denomination within a short distance of each other. Some of those churches had less than ten people attending yet they refused to join with each other and pool their resources. The focus was on their buildings. While we fight over these issues, the kingdom of God suffers. Jesus challenged those present to put these small matters aside and get on with the work of the kingdom.

Jesus accused the Pharisees in Matthew 23:25 of cleaning the outside of the cup but leaving the inside filthy. They were religious on the outside but inside they were filled with greed and self-centeredness. They were like "white-washed tombs" They painted the outside of the tombs but the paint outside did not change the fact that the inside was filled with dead men's bones and rotting flesh. Jesus told the Pharisees that they needed to get their priorities straight.

The Pharisees built tombs for the prophets and decorated the graves of righteous people who had gone before them. By these actions they seemed to demonstrate that they respected and honoured the prophets and servants of God. They lifted up the words of the prophets in their teaching. With their words they proclaimed that they would never have killed the prophets like their fathers did. While they spoke these words, they were still the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. In other words, they honoured the prophets with their words but they did not

follow their teachings or take their warnings into account. Jesus saw them as adding to the evil of their fathers.

Jesus went as far as to call the Pharisees snakes and vipers. They poisoned the people they taught with their venom. God would send more prophets to them. Jesus prophesied that these religious leaders would kill them, flog them and cast them out of the synagogues. They would even pursue them from town to town. In the days and years to follow, this is exactly what happened. The Pharisees had an important role to play in the death of Jesus. Paul, a Pharisee, would go from town to town trying to destroy Christians. Jesus told the Pharisees that they would be as guilty as all those who had killed the prophets before them.

Jesus ended with a heart wrenching cry. He reminded the people of Jerusalem of how many times He longed to draw them to Himself like a hen gathers her chicks but they would not come to Him. Jesus speaks here to a religious people. He speaks to a people who were busy with religious activities but had no time for the Son of God. They were busy making converts but they were not in a relationship with God themselves. They defended the doctrines and maintained their synagogues but they were living in sin. The outside looked good but inside things were falling apart.

Jesus concluded by reminding the Pharisees that they would not see Him again until they saw Him coming in glory. This was His final word to them. The next time He came to them He would come as their judge. If He came to you today as your judge, would you be ready?

## For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about the desire of God for purity from the heart?
- What does it mean to strain the gnat but swallow the camel? How do we do this today?
- What do we learn about seeking glory for ourselves in ministry?
- Is it possible to love our position in the church more than we love the Lord? Explain.
- Why is it important for us not to get caught up in titles and position?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you any area in your life where you are like the Pharisees.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for pride. Ask Him to help you to be content to be a servant. Ask Him to set you free from the desire to please people and seek recognition.
- Ask God to remove all hypocrisy in your life. Ask Him to give you grace to love and serve Him from the heart.
- Do you know leaders who are caught up in their title and position? Ask the Lord to give them grace to walk in humility with a servant attitude.



# 13

## THE WIDOW'S MITE

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Read Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4

As we begin this next section, we find Jesus standing in the temple watching the people. He saw rich people putting their money in the offering box as they came in. While He stood there, a widow came in and placed just a few coins in the box. The coins she put in the box were the smallest coins available. Mark mentions that these coins were worth only a fraction of a penny (Mark 12:42).

When Jesus saw what this woman gave, His heart was touched. He called His disciples to Him and told them how she had given all she had to live on. He commended the woman for giving these two coins and reminded His disciples that she had given more than the rich people who had come in before her. While the rich people had given out of their surplus, this woman had given all she had to live on. Jesus considered her gift to be more significant than all the other gifts. There are several important lessons we need to see here.

First, the Lord wants His people to be a giving people. The work of God cannot expand if God's people do not give. The picture of the Lord Jesus watching what people were putting into the offering ought to challenge us. He was interested in what people were giving as they came into the temple that day. He expected that they would give so that the work of His father would expand. He expects no less of us today.

The second principle we need to see here is that the significance of the gift is not in its size but in the sacrifice involved. Jesus was more touched by the widow's gift than He was by the large gifts of the rich. The rich gave larger sums of money but they did not give sacrificially. They had all they needed. They had food on their tables and provisions for tomorrow. There was no real sacrifice in their gifts. The widow, on the other hand, gave all she had to live on. She did not know what she was going to have to eat tomorrow because she gave all she had. Jesus was aware of the sacrifice and took special note of this. He knew this lady gave out of a desire to serve God. She placed Him and His work first in her life and was willing to sacrifice her next meal so that God's kingdom would be advanced. Jesus saw the love and devotion in her gift and rejoiced in it.

That day the woman had two coins in her hands. She could have given one to the Lord and kept one for herself but she chose to give it all. This widow gave with no concern for herself. She trusted the Lord to take care of her and her needs. The Lord Jesus taught His disciples that they were not to worry about tomorrow. In Matthew 6:34, He told them:

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

How often have we become so concerned about tomorrow that we cannot give today? I believe that we do need to make provisions for our future. This is only wise. There are times, however, when making provision for our future is only an excuse not to serve the kingdom of God today. We do not know what tomorrow holds or even if there will be a tomorrow. God expects us to use what we have to serve Him today. Don't ignore the needs around you today. The enemy is very good at getting us to focus on tomorrow. The widow refused to let her concerns for the future keep her from ministering at that moment.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the importance of giving?
- Have you been giving sacrificially to the Lord?
- How does our giving reflect what we see as important?
- Is it wrong to save our money for tomorrow? How do we find the balance between being prepared for tomorrow and giving to the needs of today?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you the faith to be able to give more sacrificially.

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for any lack of passion for His kingdom. Ask Him to renew your passion for the kingdom so that your giving reflects that passion.
- Thank the Lord that when He leads us to give what we have today He will provide for us in our need tomorrow.

# 14

## SIGNS OF THE END:

### PART 1

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Read Matthew 24:1-14; Mark 13:1-14; Luke 21:5-20

Jesus had been in the temple watching people put their offering into the treasury box. As He left the temple, the disciples called His attention to the temple buildings. No expense had been spared in the construction of this magnificent structure. While not as glorious as the temple of Solomon, this temple was very beautiful. In the account of Mark and Luke, the disciples commented particularly on the stones that were used in the construction of the temple.

Jesus told His disciples that the day was coming when not a single stone would be left on another. The temple would be completely destroyed. This was a prophetic word related to the time of Emperor Titus who ordered that the Temple of Jerusalem be torn down.

There are times when we wonder why the Lord allows things to happen in our lives. What we see here, however, ought to warn us about placing too much value on the

things of this world. These things are only temporary. I have met believers in my day whose love for their church building outweighed their love and devotion to the Lord. The temple was a glorious building but, in some cases, it distracted God's people from their relationship with him. There can be things like this in our lives.

The disciples were struck by these words of Jesus about the temple. They asked Him to explain what He meant. They wanted to know when these things were going to happen. They also asked Him about the signs that would precede the end of the age. Obviously they believed that the destruction of the temple would be one clear sign that the end was coming. Let's take a look at Jesus' answer and what He said will happen as the end of the world as we know it draws near.

### *Sign 1: False Christs*

Jesus told His disciples to beware of those who would come to deceive them in the last days. He told them that many would come claiming to be Christ. They would be successful in deceiving many people. Satan is aware of the prophecies of Scripture and will do His best to counterfeit the work of God. In those days, false christs will be empowered by Satan to do miracles. They will speak convincing words and deceive many into following them. We need to be careful not to fall into their trap. How important it is that we know the Word of God and are able to distinguish God's voice from the voices of the false prophets who will come.

### *Sign 2: Rumours of War*

Jesus went on to teach His disciples that in the last days there will also be rumours of war. That is to say, there will

be a general agitation in the world as relationships between countries become strained. The threat of war will be very real. Nation would rise up against nation. Kingdom would wage war against kingdom. Jesus told His disciples that this was just the beginning of the end. He reminded them that these things needed to happen before the end came. They were not to be alarmed when they saw this prophecy being fulfilled. He told them these things would happen.

### *Sign 3: Famines and Earthquakes*

As the last days approach the earth itself will become agitated. The blessing of God will be withdrawn from the land. There will not be enough food. Famine will spread across the world. The earth will be subject to earthquakes in a variety of places. Luke tells us that there will also be many pestilences and terrifying signs in the heavens. These physical signs will only be the beginning of the birth pains of the end. They are God's way of warning the world that the end is coming.

### *Sign 4: Persecution of Believers*

As these signs unfold in the world; at the same time there will also be a growing persecution of the church of Jesus Christ. The enemy will increase His efforts as the time of the end approaches. The church will become the focus of His attacks. Believers will be handed over to be persecuted. They will be hated by all nations and put to death for their faith. They will be whipped and beaten for their faith. They will stand as witnesses before governors and kings of the earth. Some will be put to death as martyrs. As they are persecuted however, the gospel will continue to spread to the ends of the earth. The willingness of believers to die for the Lord will be a powerful testimony.

Jesus promised that the Spirit would be with them in those days. He reminded them that in their moment of persecution they would not have to worry about what they were to say. The Holy Spirit would be especially close to them in that time and give them words to say. God would draw near to them in this time of persecution.

Mark and Luke tell us that in those days brother will hand over brother to be tried for his faith. A father will deliver his children to be persecuted and put to death. Children will hand their parents over to the authorities. Jesus told His disciples that people would hate them for His sake.

Jesus reminded the disciples in Luke 21:18 that by standing firm in those days not a single hair of their heads would perish. They would gain life by persevering to the end. While the enemy may harm or even kill their bodies, he will not destroy the work God is doing in them. The enemy could take their bodies but he could not take their souls. They would live on forever in the presence of their Saviour unharmed and unthreatened by what Satan was doing.

### *Sign 5: Falling Away*

Because of this intense persecution of believers, many in the church will fall away from the faith. Matthew 24:10 tells us how they will fall away. First, they will fall away from the faith. That is to say, they will turn their backs on the truth about the Lord Jesus and His Word. The truth will be watered down. They will compromise their faith and teach what suits them.

Second, they will fall away from love for each other. In those days men and women will betray and hate each other. The attempt of the enemy here is to divide the church so that it has no impact in the world.

Third, that there will be an increase of false prophets. The enemy will put these man and women inside the church to weaken it from within. These false prophets will be respected individuals who give the church wrong direction and teaching. They will be Satan's instruments in the church to deceive and lead it astray.

Finally, there will be an increase of wickedness which will result in the love of many growing cold. I believe that this wickedness will not only be in the world but also in the church. In our days, horrible stories of immorality and dishonesty are being told about church leaders. Love grows cold in this context. Jesus reminds us that in the days of the end the church will suffer from the inside. Despite this effort of Satan to destroy the church, Jesus promised that the gospel will still move forward. Satan will not be able to stop the advance of the kingdom of God (see Matthew 24:14). Only when the gospel has spread to the far corners of the earth will the end come. Satan is not in control. God will accomplish His purposes.

#### For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about the difficulties that will come for believers as the days of the end approach? Are you ready to face these difficulties?
- Are there evidences of these things happening in our day?
- In this passage the Lord God allowed the temple to be torn down. Has God ever stripped you of

something in your life? What did He teach you through this?

- What do we learn in this passage about how the Lord will advance the cause of the kingdom despite the efforts of the enemy to destroy?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you grace to remain faithful to Him despite the efforts of the enemy to defeat you in your faith.
- Thank the Lord that He will be victorious in the end. Thank Him that the enemy cannot overcome.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for letting other things become more important than Him in your life.

# 15

## SIGNS OF THE END:

### PART 2

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Read Matthew 24:15-35; Mark 13:15-31; Luke 21:21-33

We continue to examine the teaching of the Lord Jesus about the end times. In the last section we saw how parents will hand over their children to authorities because of their faith. Many will suffer and die for their Lord. Here in this next passage, Jesus warns His disciples about the abomination that caused desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel. He told them that when they saw this abomination in the holy place they were to flee to the mountains. Let's consider what Jesus taught His disciples here.

Daniel prophesied that the day would come when a mighty ruler would set up an abominable object in the temple.

After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will

continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." Daniel 9:26-27 (NIV)

Many commentators believe this took place when Antiochus Ephiphanes set up an altar to the god Jupiter in the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. According to the Law of Moses, the Gentile was not even allowed into the temple. Here we see a pagan altar being set up in the temple of God. This was an abomination and a terrible blasphemy against the Lord God. This was what Antiochus Ephiphanes wanted. He wanted to make it clear that he was not afraid of the Lord God of Israel and he openly defied Him.

God's people were told that when they saw this abomination in the temple they were to flee to the mountains. Persecution was going to break out. This was the sign that great difficulty and trouble was about to be unleashed on the people of God. What happened in the temple of Jerusalem after the death of the Lord Jesus would happen again. The apostle John prophesied that there would be a time when the people of God would be again trampled by the enemy. Writing in Revelation 11:1-2, he said:

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.

There will be terrible blasphemy on the earth as the days of the Lord's return draws near. The unbeliever will not hesitate to trample on the things of God and shake His or her fist at God and His holy things.

Jesus told His listeners that these days of blasphemy and persecution would be very difficult. When believers saw these things coming to pass they are to flee immediately to save their lives, leaving everything behind. This persecution would come swiftly.

Notice the compassion of the Lord in Matthew 24:19. He felt particular concern for pregnant women and nursing mothers. He knew how difficult it would be for them in these days trying to flee for their lives along with their children. The Lord's eyes were particularly on them. He knows our pain and suffering. Notice how Jesus challenged His children to pray that their flight would not have to be in the cold winter or on the Sabbath day when it would be against their principles to travel (see Matthew 24:20). Jesus spoke this prophecy with tremendous compassion. He is a very gentle prophet. He felt the pain of those who would have to flee in those days. He saw their struggle and as He spoke, His heart was broken for what these individuals would have to face in those horrible days. We need more preachers like this in our day, who feel the pain and suffering of those to whom they minister.

Jesus also told His disciples that those days would be days of great distress. Jesus promised that while the persecution would be violent, it would be cut short. If it were not cut short no one would survive. God would shorten those days to save the lives of His children.

Why do God's people have to face difficulty, suffering and pain? There is no easy answer to this question. All we

know is that God will use these times to shape and prepare His people for even greater things. During times of struggle and difficulty priorities are shifted. God's people are strengthened. We are able to understand His love and enabling in a new and deeper sense. Satan lashes out against us but God will use whatever He does to strengthen and equip us for greater service and deeper intimacy with Him.

Jesus told His listeners that in these days of persecution there would be many false christs and false prophets. They would come with signs and wonders to deceive the people of God. Satan has His own brand of comfort and would send His false prophets to mislead and deceive even the people of God. Jesus warns us so that we will not be deceived.

Jesus went on to tell His disciples that His second coming will be visible to all. He will return like lightning brightening the entire sky. Everyone will see Him. When He comes, it will be a glorious return. He will come in such a way that every eye.

In Matthew 24:28, Jesus reminded His disciples that wherever there is a carcass, vultures would gather. Jesus used this illustration to show that just as it was in the nature of the vulture to find a dead carcass, so it was in the nature of the believer to recognize the true Christ at His return. There will be no question in the minds of God's people about the return of the Lord. He will be recognized by all who are His.

According to Luke 21:24, Jerusalem would be trampled on until the time of the Gentiles was accomplished. From this we understand that there would be a time when the focus of God would shift to the Gentile world. The Gospel of

Jesus Christ would spread across the world bringing many men and women to God. We are seeing this happen in our day as people from every nation turn to Christ. During this time of the Gentiles, the Jews would continue to suffer. We don't have to look too hard to see how the Jewish people have suffered. For generations they have been hated and killed. Attempts have been made to exterminate them. God will not forget them, however. He still has a purpose and plan for them. The time will come when the Lord will revisit His people.

Immediately after the days of persecution there will be powerful signs in the heavens. The sun will be darkened and the moon will no longer give its light. Stars will fall from the sky and the heavens will be shaken. The Lord Jesus will appear in the sky. In that day nations will be in great distress. They had rejected Him and turned their backs on Him. Now their judgment was coming.

God will send His angels throughout the earth to gather His people from every nation. We understand from this that while believers will have to suffer and go through great persecution, God will spare them from the final judgment.

Jesus gave His disciples an illustration of a fig tree. He told them that when they saw the leaves coming on a fig tree they knew that summer was near. In the same way, they needed to watch the signs of the time. When they saw the things that Jesus predicted happening, they would know that the end was near.

Notice that Jesus told His disciples that "this generation" would not pass until the thing He has been telling them happened. This has caused some problems for Bible scholars. The generation of Jesus' day has come and gone but still Jesus has not returned. The New

International Version has a footnote that says that the word "generation" could also be translated by the word "race." This would extend time from the generation of Jesus day to our own generation as part of the human race.

What we need to understand, however, is that even the generation that lived in Jesus' day would begin to see the fulfilment of these words of prophecy. The disciples themselves would die under the persecution that would break out in their days. Acts 8:1 describes a persecution that broke out in Jerusalem and scattered believers throughout Judea and Samaria

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Jesus reminded His disciples that while heaven and earth would be destroyed in the end, His words would always be true. Satan could unleash all he had but he would never be able to frustrate the plan and purpose of God.

We are challenged to be a people who seek the Lord and remain faithful to Him. The day will come when Satan will be unleashed. Believers will suffer for their faith. God remains in control. In the end, those who remain on the earth will be gathered together and kept from the final judgment of God on the unbeliever. How important it is to be sure that we are in a right relationship with God today. May God give us grace to be faithful to Him as the days of the end approach.

## For Consideration:

- What has the Lord God accomplished through trials and difficulty in your life?
- Do we need to fear persecution and trials? What do we learn here about them in this section of Scripture?
- What does this passage teach us about the sovereignty of God over the events of this world?
- Are you ready to face the persecution and difficulty that is coming? Where will your strength to face these trials come from in those days?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you face the trials that come your way. Ask Him to teach you all He wants to teach you through these trials.
- Ask the Lord to keep you close to Him so that you will not be deceived by false prophets and false christs.
- Thank the Lord that while He may sometimes allow us to face trials and persecution, He is deeply concerned for us and cares for us in these times.
- Thank the Lord that He is in control and will win the victory. Thank Him that you will be victorious in Him.

- If you do not know the Lord today, take a moment to ask Him to forgive you and accept you as His child.

# 16

## SIGNS OF THE END:

### PART 3

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Read Matthew 24:36-51; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 21:34-38

Jesus has been teaching His disciples about the things that were going to happen as the end of the world approached. He told them of the difficulties and trials that awaited believers before He returned.

In Matthew 24:36, Jesus made it clear that no one knew the hour or day of His return. He told His disciples that neither He nor the angels of heaven knew the day. The date and time was in the mind of the Father only. Many people have tried to predict the day of the Lord's return. By reading the signs of the times we can have a general idea but no one knows the actual day.

Because we do not know the day or the hour of Christ's return, we must live in a state of constant readiness. Jesus tells us that in the last days, people will live as they did in the days of Noah before the flood. The judgment was about to fall but they were unprepared. They had been

warned but it did not change their lifestyle. They did not repent of their sins or seek the Lord. The flood came and took them away. They died in their rebellion. Jesus told His disciples that this is what it will be like in the last days. Men and women will turn their backs on God. They will rebel and wander from the truth. They will refuse to turn from their sin.

Two men would be in a field working together and only one would be taken to be with the Lord. Two women would be grinding at a mill. One would go to be with the Lord and the other one would remain to face His wrath. Which one will you be? Will you be ready for the return of the Lord? Jesus told His followers, in Luke's account, to keep themselves from being weighted down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life (see Luke 21:34).

Dissipation relates to wastefulness and fruitless activities. The person who lives in dissipation is wasting his or her life and resources on meaningless things. The drunken lifestyle that Jesus speaks about is the lifestyle I hear about as I sit in coffee shops to write. How many people live to party? They love their alcohol and their celebrations. They are not concerned about the Lord and His Word.

The Lord also challenges us not to be weighed down with the anxieties of life. The concern about what we have or do not have falls into this category. How many people get caught up in the pursuit of "things?" You don't have to live in a prosperous country to get caught up in the things of this world. You can have nothing and live your life not content with what God has given you. Materialism and the pursuit of "things" is not just the sin of the rich. It is the sin of anyone who makes the pursuit of worldly goods their passion and god.

To emphasize His point Jesus told a story about a homeowner and a thief. If the homeowner knew that a thief was coming to his house he would keep watch. He would do everything in his power to keep his house from being robbed. In the same way, because we know that the Lord is coming, we also need to be ready. We need to live each day in light of the fact that it could be today that He comes.

What does it mean to be ready for the return of the Lord? Jesus illustrated this by telling His disciples about a master who put his servant in charge of his household. He gave him the responsibility to care for the other servants in the house and to provide them with food at the right time. Suppose this servant, realizing that the master was going to be away for a long time, decided to beat the servants and use the money given to him to drink with his friends. What would the master do when he returned and found out what his servant had done? Would the master not punish him severely? If, on the other hand, he was found faithful in doing the work he was given to do, would he not be rewarded? To be ready is to be faithful in doing what the Lord has called us to do.

This is a real challenge. It is quite possible for us to be busy doing all kinds of things, but are we doing what He has called us to do? The servant was given the specific task of feeding and ministering to the master's servants. What would have happened if he decided to do something else instead of what the master asked him to do? He might do something good but if it was not what the master asked him to do, he would be disobedient. Being ready is not about being busy. It is about being obedient.

Luke 21:37-38 tells us that Jesus was in the temple when He gave this teaching. Those who heard this message were religious people who desired to worship and serve

God. The sin of not doing what God requires is not just the sin of the unbeliever but also the sin of the believer.

For Consideration:

- What does it mean to be ready for the Lord's return?
- Are you ready for the Lord to return today?
- What has God called you to do in this life? Have you been faithful?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He promises to return for us.
- Ask the Lord to show you clearly what He has called you to do? Ask Him to help you to be faithful in that task.
- Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal to you anything that keeps you from being ready for His return.

# 17

## THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

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Read Matthew 25:1-13

In the last few meditations, the Lord Jesus spoke about the end times and His return in glory. In Matthew 25, Jesus told His followers a parable to illustrate what He was teaching. He told them that the kingdom of heaven was like ten young women who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. A wedding was usually celebrated with a great feast at the home of the bride's parents. All the friends were invited. It was from this banquet that the groom would take His bride to the home he had prepared for them. The ten young women mentioned here were friends of the bride who waited for the arrival of the groom at the wedding feast.

Notice something about these virgins. Five of them were wise and five were foolish. The difference between them had to do with the fact that the wise ones took extra oil for their lamps while the foolish ones didn't.

The bridegroom took a long time coming to the feast. The bride's friends grew weary and fell asleep as they waited. At midnight they heard a cry: "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" (Matthew 25: 5). The ten women woke from their sleep and picked up their lamps. The foolish ones realized that they had no oil left in their lamps and asked the wise ones for some of theirs. The wise virgins refused to give them any because there was not enough for both of them. They counselled them, instead to go and buy some for themselves.

The foolish young women ran off to buy oil for their lamps. While they were away, the groom arrived at the banquet and the doors were shut. When they returned they found the doors closed. They cried out for the doors to be opened. From inside came the reply: "I don't know you" (Matthew 25:12). They were refused entrance into the banquet because they had not been prepared. Jesus concluded this parable with a challenge to be ready for His return because we do not know the hour or the day.

There are several points we need to emphasize in this parable. Notice here that while the foolish virgins and wise virgins came to the celebration together, they were very different. The foolish virgins were not allowed into the wedding banquet. The bridegroom told them that he did not know them. These young women stood at the door. They were friends of the wise virgins but they were not allowed into the banquet. There are many people like this. These people are in our churches and may even help in our ministries. They claim to be waiting with us for the return of the Lord. They claim to love Him but they really do not know Him. The light of God's Spirit does not shine in their heart.

There is a second point we need to see. The wise women in this story could not give their oil to their foolish friends.

There is only one source of the oil of God's Spirit. Each of us must come to Christ and receive Him ourselves. The faith of our friends and loved ones is of no value to us personally. The foolish virgins came to realize this too late. They were trusting in their friends to get into the banquet but their friends could not help them.

The foolish women needed to find their own oil. All the wise ones could do was point them to the source. Our faith must be ours. We must each have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus if we hope to enter His presence and live with Him forever.

When the foolish virgins returned to the banquet they were too late. The voice from inside claimed it did not know them. What terrible words to hear. They had put off their decision for too long. They were not ready when the bridegroom returned. When He returns the door will be shut and no one else will enter. This is how it will be at the return of the Lord Jesus. We don't know when He will return but we do know from this passage that when He returns the door of salvation and forgiveness will be closed.

In the days of Noah, the floods arrived and the doors of the ark were closed. When those doors were closed there was no more opportunity to come into the ark. Our decision for the Lord must be made. Tomorrow the door of opportunity may be closed.

## For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the difference between those who are "religious" and those who are truly children of God?
- What is the difference between the oil of religious effort and the oil of the Spirit?
- What do we learn here about the necessity of a personal decision for Christ? Can someone else make that decision for us?
- Do you know that the Spirit of God lives in you? What is the evidence of His presence?

## For Prayer:

- Do you have the assurance that you are a child of God? Take a moment to thank the Lord for the way He has brought you into His family.
- Ask God to forgive you and fill you with His Holy Spirit so that you can live under His direction and working in your life.
- Thank the Lord that the day is coming when He will return. Thank Him for the great celebration we will have on that day.
- Ask God to help you to be ready for His return. Ask Him to show you what He wants you to do as you prepare for His return.

# 18

## THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

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Read Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus continued His discussion on what it meant to be ready for His return. Here in Matthew 25, He told a parable about a man going on a journey. He entrusted a portion of His money to His servants to invest during His absence.

Notice that not everyone received an equal amount. To one servant the man gave five talents. To another he gave two talents. To another he left only one talent. The word talent here should not be confused with special abilities that the Lord gives us; though the application of this verse would apply to these abilities as well. The talent was a weight of gold or silver about 75 pounds or 34 kilograms.

Verse 15 tells us that each servant received according to His ability. The master knew each of His servants well. He knew how much they could handle. There are times in our lives when we feel that the burden and responsibility we have been given is too much for us to handle. The reality

is that God will never give us more than we are able to bear. He knows us personally. If He has given you to a particular burden you can be sure that you will, by His grace, be able to bear it.

The man who was given five talents put His money to work. Notice that he did not waste any time. The New International Version tells us that he went "at once" (verse 16). God expects us to do the same. His diligence paid off and he gained five more talents. The man who was given two talents also invested His money and gained two more talents.

The man who was only given one talent dug a hole in the ground and buried the master's money. There are several things we need to understand here. The man who buried His talent understood the nature of investing money. He understood that there were risks. He did not want to take the risk of losing what the master had given him. Without risk in the Christian life there can be no gain. God calls us to step out in faith. He calls us to lay all we have on the altar. We may risk losing friends and family members. We may lose our reputation or our finances. God calls us to trust Him and take that risk. This man seems unwilling to take that step.

After a time, the master returned home and called His servants to give an account of their actions. The man who had five talents brought five more to the master. He had proven himself to be faithful so the master rewarded him with greater responsibility.

The man who had two talents brought two more to His master. The master commended him also. For His faithfulness he, too, was given more.

Finally, the man who buried His talent approached the master. He explained that he knew that he was afraid he would not be able to make His talent work for the master. He was afraid he did not have the skills necessary to invest wisely. How often has the enemy caused us to believe that our tiny gift would amount to nothing? The enemy wants nothing more than for us to bury the gift the Lord has given.

The master rebuked the last servant for being lazy and wicked. These were the words of the Lord to a man who did not use His gifts. It is a sin in the eyes of Jesus to waste what He has given. We need to see our gifts in this light. Jesus told the servant that it was His responsibility to invest what was given him. The Lord Jesus expects that we develop and use our spiritual gifts. Because of His unfaithfulness, the master took the talent he had given to His servant and gave it to the one who had ten talents. The master knew he could trust the man with ten talents. He had proven to be faithful and so he would receive more.

As for the worthless servant, he was thrown into a darkness of great pain and suffering. We need to consider this in more detail. The Lord is *not* telling us here that if we don't use our spiritual gifts we will go to hell. This would go against the teaching of the rest of Scripture. The key to understanding this verse is found in the response of the man to the master and His call.

Notice that the servant is described as being a worthless servant. He was worthless because he never responded to the master's call. This servant can really be compared to the unbeliever who though he or she may be among Christians has never received the Lord Jesus or taken His call seriously. Instead, like this worthless servant, they push Him aside for other things. The call of God goes out to all people. God calls men and women to Himself and

His service. Many however, refuse to accept Him and commit themselves to His service. Those who refuse the Lord Jesus and surrender to Him and the service of His kingdom will one day have to answer to Him. Those who have refused Him and His invitation will be judged and condemned for eternity in hell where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

This is the situation for the worthless servant. He made a decision. He did not take the call of God seriously. He buried His talent and thought no more of it until he had to give an account before His master. How many people have you met who have heard the call of God and put it aside? The other servants in this parable were very different. They responded to the call of their master and committed themselves to Him and His service. They would be rewarded for their commitment.

God wants to produce fruit in us. If you are a child of God, be assured that He wants to use you to advance His kingdom. The call goes out today to each person reading this commentary. Will you surrender to Him, receive Him and become His servant or will you push aside that call like the worthless servant?

Notice here, in conclusion that if we want more responsibility we need first to be faithful with what we have. Two of the men in this passage were given more because they were faithful with what they already had. Could it be that the reason you have not been given greater responsibility is because you first need to prove yourself in small things? Be faithful in what God has already given you and He may entrust you in greater things. Realize that it is not how much we have that counts but how faithful we are with what we have. Both the man who had five talents and the man who had two were commended for their faithfulness

and rewarded with greater responsibility in the kingdom. The key is to be faithful with whatever God gives.

For Consideration:

- What gifts has God given you? What is your role in the kingdom?
- Have you been faithful in using the gifts God has given you? What more could you be doing?
- What risks have you been willing to take for the sake of the kingdom of God? How have you stepped out in faith? How has God answered that faith?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to increase your faith and willingness to step out boldly for Him.
- Ask the Lord to give you a clear sense of His calling for your life.
- Take a moment now to commit yourself to be faithful in the little things God has given you to do.
- Thank the Lord for the gifts He has given you and ask Him to lead you in how to use those gifts more effectively for His kingdom.



# 19

## THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

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Read Matthew 25:31-46

The return of the Lord Jesus will not be like His first coming. When He came as a baby He came quietly. Matthew 25:31 tells us that His return will be in glory. When the Lord returns He will come with angels at His side. Every eye will see him. What a wonderful day that will be for those who look for His return. What a day of terror it will be, however, for those who are not ready.

Matthew tells us that all the nations of the earth will be gathered before Him when He returns. On that day He will separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep will be placed on His right and the goats to His left. In the Scripture, believers are often compared to sheep and Christ is their shepherd (John 10:11-13). The right hand is the side of honour. If a person wanted to honour someone in Bible times he would ask him or her to sit at His right hand. The Lord Jesus had this place of honour at His Father's right hand. Matthew 26:64 tells us:

Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

By placing the sheep at His right hand, the Lord was giving them a place of honour. These sheep belonged to Him and the Lord honoured them, even as they had honoured Him in life. The goats were placed to His left. They were condemned and dishonoured because they did not belong to Him nor had they accepted Him or honoured Him in life.

Notice the blessing those who are at His right side received. The Lord called them blessed. He offered them an inheritance. His kingdom belonged to them. He had been preparing this kingdom for them from the very beginning of time. Now they would enter and dwell there forever. No one would disturb them. Nothing would harm them. They would be with their Lord forever, protected and secure under His reign.

Throughout their lives these sheep had demonstrated the character of Christ. They fed the hungry and gave the thirsty a drink. They took strangers in and clothed those who needed clothing. They cared for those who were sick and visited those who were in prison. Jesus reminded them that what they had done for His children, they had done for Him.

It is important for us to remember that there is a connection between the Lord Jesus and those who belong to Him. Whatever we do for them, we also do for Him. If you speak evil against a brother or sister, the Lord Jesus feels their pain. If you minister to them the Lord Jesus is Himself blessed. It is hard to imagine that the Lord Jesus would have such an intimate connection with us. The Lord feels

what His children feel. How careful we need to be in our relationships. To dishonour a child of God is to dishonour God.

There was also a place reserved for the goats. Jesus told them to depart from Him. They were to go to the devil and His angels. They had not ministered to His brothers in their need. They had turned their back on Him, now He would turn His back on them.

We should not assume from this that the Lord is telling us that if we do good to those around us we will go to heaven. This would go against the teaching of the rest of the Word of God. What the Lord is telling His listeners here is that those who belong to Him will act like His children. In other words, if you are a child of your heavenly Father you will demonstrate His character in your life. We all demonstrate, to some extent, the characteristics of our parents. If we are God's children we will show His characteristics in our lives. We will have His heart. People will see a reflection of the Father in us and know we belong to Him. This is what Jesus is speaking about here. The goats were those who did not have the heart of God. They belonged to their father the devil and would spend eternity with him.

God knows those who belong to Him. Heaven and hell are real places. Jesus reminds His listeners that the day is coming when He will judge the earth. We will all stand before Him to give an account of our life. Will you be ready?

## For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the reality of judgment to come?
- Are you sure you belong to the Lord? How do you know?
- What does this passage tell us about the relationship between the Lord Jesus and His children?
- Is the character of your heavenly Father being reflected in your life? What changes have you seen in your life since you have come to know the Lord?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to produce more of His character in you.
- Ask the Lord to help you to love His children as He does. Ask Him to open doors for you to minister more in His name.
- Ask the Lord to give you the assurance that you truly belong to Him. Thank Him for that assurance if you already have it.
- Take a moment to pray for an individual who does not yet know the Lord Jesus as His Saviour and Lord. Ask God to open their heart to who He is and to the salvation He offers them.

## PLOT TO KILL JESUS

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Read Matthew 26:1-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2

Having finished His teaching about the end times, the Lord Jesus turned His attention to the immediate future and the things He was going to face before His return in glory.

Jesus reminded His disciples that the Passover was just two days away. He told them that He would be handed over to be crucified at that time. The Passover celebrated the day the Lord God set His people free from the bondage of Egypt. On the evening before the Passover, God commanded the children of Israel to sacrifice a young lamb and paint its blood on the door posts of their homes. The angel of death would "pass over" the land and kill the first born child of every family whose door post did not have the blood of the lamb painted on it. The blood of the lamb would save them from death.

The Lord Jesus was to become the Passover Lamb. He would be sacrificed at Passover so all who trusted Him would be saved from death. It must have been hard for the disciples to understand the significance of what Jesus was

telling them here. Only later would they see the symbolism in Jesus' death at the time of the Jewish Passover.

Even as Jesus spoke to His disciples, the elders and priests were meeting at the palace of the high priest to make plans to arrest and kill Him. They believed that by doing so they would erase His influence from the earth. What they did not realize was that by crucifying the Lord Jesus they would open the way for the forgiveness of sins and for the message of the gospel to be preached to the far corners of the earth.

As we examine this passage, we see that God is sovereign over all the struggles that come our way. The spiritual leaders plotted evil against Jesus but God would use it to accomplish His purposes. What they intended for evil; God would use for good. Maybe you too have suffered at the hands of other human beings. God is able to use what has happened to you for good if you trust Him. There is no reason for despair. The road ahead might be rough but victory is guaranteed. Jesus would face what was ahead with confidence in His Father. People would kill Him but God would bring Him to glory.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about how God can use evil to accomplish good in our lives?
- Have you ever suffered at the hands of fellow human beings? How has God used that to bring good into your life?

- What comfort do you take from this passage regarding the fact that God sometimes uses the cross or the wilderness to prepare us for glory?
- How does knowing that God is sovereign change how we face our difficulties?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have not been able to trust Him in your trials. Ask Him for strength to trust that He will work all things out for your good.
- Thank the Lord that He is able to use even the evil done to us to accomplish good in our lives.
- Commit yourself to trusting the Lord through the difficulties you are facing today. Thank Him that He will use this for your good.



## 21

### JESUS IN ANOINTED

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Read Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9

Jesus was at the home of Simon the Leper in Bethany. We do not know anything about Simon's background. His name indicates that he may have had leprosy at one point in his life. Obviously, however, he was now healed. The focus of this passage is not on Simon but on a woman who came into the home as Jesus and His disciples were reclining at the table. She came into Simon's house with a jar of perfume and poured it on the head of Jesus as He reclined at the table.

Mark tells us that the perfume she used was pure nard. Nard had to be imported and was very expensive. Mark tells us that the estimated value of a jar of nard was about one year's wages (Mark 14:5). When those present saw what this woman had done they were quite upset. The disciples felt that the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor. Those present that day rebuked the woman for her act.

Jesus was aware of what the people were saying and spoke on her behalf. "She has done a beautiful thing to me," He said (Matthew 26:10). He told those present that they would always have the poor with them and would have plenty of opportunity to minister to them. Jesus, however, was going to leave them shortly. This would be the last opportunity this woman had to express her deep appreciation and love to Him. There are some important details we need to see in this passage.

First, we need to see the devotion of the woman. She willingly poured out a year's worth of wages on Jesus' head. Was this her life savings? It is clear that she felt nothing was too big to give to the Lord Jesus. She came with a heart that was right with Him and offered Him this costly gift. She offered Jesus her most treasured and valuable possession.

Second, the disciples judged the woman for how she gave. The disciples judged the woman because they thought she should have used her resources in a different way. They felt she was being wasteful. Jesus accepted her gift and rejoiced in it. How careful we need to be about what we say about others. We are quick to judge motives and intentions. What the disciples did not realize was that this woman was acting in accordance with the will and purpose of God. God was leading this woman to anoint Jesus for His death. By rebuking the woman, the disciples were standing against God's purposes.

Third, when it comes to giving, we need to be very sensitive to the leading and direction of the Lord. When I was called to the mission field some years ago many people approached me to ask me why I was going overseas because there were many needs in my own country. The Lord showed me at that time that I was not to go because

of need but because of His leading. Just because there is a need does not mean that I am to give to that need. God wants some to give to the poor and others to give richly like this woman did. We need to give as God moves us. Jesus made it clear to those present that this woman was being called to anoint His body for death. Very likely the woman did not understand this. We do not always understand what God is leading us to do. All this woman knew was that she needed to pour out all her perfume on His head.

Jesus reminded His disciples that the story of what this woman had done would be told throughout the world in her memory. They condemned her actions but Jesus blessed her. The whole world would learn from her and rejoice in her devotion.

Here before us is a woman who did what the Lord put on her heart to do. She did so despite what others thought, and despite the high cost. She did so even though she really did not understand why God was asking her to do it. She stands out as a powerful example for us to follow. Would you do what God put on your heart even if you knew that others would think you to be a fool? Would you give at such a high cost? Would you offer all that you had? Would you sell all, leave all or sacrifice all? Would you do so even if it did not make sense? We need more people like this woman who are willing to step out regardless of the cost or what others might think.

## For Consideration:

- How much are you willing to give for the cause of Christ?
- What does this passage teach us about the importance of seeking the Lord's will in how we give?
- What do we learn about judging how other people give or use their resources?
- What particularly strikes you in the example of this lady in this passage? What is God teaching you through her example?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you the sacrificial heart that this lady had?
- Ask the Lord to set you free from what others think so that you can be unhindered in your service?
- Ask the Lord to give you ears to hear what He is asking you to do or give. Ask Him to make you more willing to obey.

## 22

### JUDAS AGREES TO BETRAY JESUS

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Read Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6

The day of Jesus' arrest was fast approaching. The priests and the elders had been holding meetings to see how they could kill Him. The answer to this question came in the form of one of Jesus' disciples. Judas Iscariot approached the chief priests and asked: "What are you willing to give me if I hand Him over to you" (Matthew 26:14)? We need to see this in light of who Judas was as a person. John tells us that Judas used to steal from the money bag (John 12:5-6). It was a well-known fact that Judas loved money. Satan knew His weakness.

It is important that we recognize Satan's tactics here. Notice that he gave the priests the answer they needed by bringing Judas to them. How easy it would be for the priests to believe that they were in the will of God because this answer came to them in such a miraculous and unsuspected way. I have met individuals who believed that because a certain door opened for them it had to be the

Lord's will for their lives. Let me be clear here, Satan also opens doors in what appears to be miraculous ways. Not every door that opens is from the Lord. We need great discernment to know who is opening the door.

Just before this incident, Judas watched as the woman poured her bottle of perfume over the head of Jesus. This frustrated him. He thought about how that bottle of perfume could have been sold and how he could have taken some of that money for himself. Judas spoke out against what was seen as an extravagant waste. It was after this event that Judas left Jesus and went to the chief priests to ask them how much money they would give Him to betray His master. He would get this money one way or another.

This incident seemed to open Judas up to Satan. As he listened to Jesus explain that this woman was right to pour her perfume on His head, His anger began to grow. This was fertile soil for the enemy to work. Luke 22:3 tells us that Satan entered Judas. From that point on Judas became His instrument. All Satan needed was the right soil. Judas provided him with that soil in His heart.

Notice particularly that Satan entered Judas. Very often this work is left to one of His demons. In this case, however, Satan does the deed himself. This shows us the significance of this event to Satan. He would not trust His demons with the task. He needed to do it personally.

This incident began with the weakness of Judas for money. The matter was not dealt with and resulted in an open door for the enemy to enter. This reminds us of the importance of dealing with our weaknesses. We dare not ignore the sins that remain in our lives. The enemy can use your weaknesses for His purposes. We dare not give Satan a target.

Judas lived with Jesus and ministered with the disciples, but he was not one of them spiritually. His heart was far from the Lord. Outwardly, he did what the others did. He had a position of honour as a chosen disciple. He did not love Jesus, however. He served only to get what he could out of Jesus and the moneybag. It is quite amazing that the Lord Jesus chose to work with Judas. Even among His own disciples was a man who would betray Him. This little group was not perfect. Judas was among them. The Lord Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him and yet throughout His ministry treated him with respect and dignity. How often have we refused to work with others because of a minor doctrinal or lifestyle issues? While it is important that we maintain integrity, we need to keep in mind here that one of Jesus' own disciples was a thief and betrayer. Jesus continued to work with him. We too need more compassion in our dealings with others?

The chief priests were delighted to hear that Judas was willing to betray Jesus. They agreed to pay him thirty pieces of silver for the deed. They wasted no time. They counted the money for Judas right away. Judas took the money, agreeing to the deed and went His way looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

This story tells us something about the spiritual condition of the leadership of the day. Here were key leaders involved in paying Judas to betray His master so that they could kill Him. These were the leaders of the people. They could not be trusted. They were sinners of the worst kind.

There is a world of difference between what we see on the outside and what is on the inside. Judas walked with the disciples of the Lord. He was counted as one of the chosen few but he was not right with God. Even as a disciple of Jesus, he was filled with Satan and would ultimately betray

Him. The spiritual leaders of the day as well looked very religious on the outside but they plotted and schemed as murderers and liars. God is not fooled by our outward appearance. He looks much deeper into our hearts and exposes our secrets.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this section about the importance of dealing with our weaknesses? How can your weaknesses be an instrument in Satan's hands?
- What does this passage teach us about working with those with whom we do not completely agree? Why do you suppose Jesus kept Judas as His disciple?
- Judas worked with the disciples but was not one of them in heart. The religious leaders were respected in their community but plotted the murder of Jesus. What does this tell us about judging others on the basis of their outward actions or appearance?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you your weaknesses. Ask Him to strengthen you in those areas of your life.
- Are you sure that you are a child of God? Thank the Lord for the way He has revealed Himself to you.

- Take a moment to pray for your spiritual leaders that they would be sincere in their faith and pure in their heart.



## 23

# PREPARATION FOR THE PASSOVER

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Read Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13

As the day of the feast approached, the disciples asked Jesus where He wanted them to make preparations for the Passover meal. Jesus told them to go into the city. When they arrived they would find a man carrying a jar of water. In many countries carrying water was mostly a woman's job. It may have stood out as being a little bit odd to see a man carrying water. The disciples were to follow him. He would lead them to a house. They were to look up the owner of that house and tell him that Jesus needed to celebrate the Passover at his place. He would show them a large upper room that was already furnished and ready. They were to make the necessary preparations there.

It is important for us to see what is happening here. When the disciples consulted Jesus He showed them His plan. The disciples could have made their own plans but they would never have come up with what the Lord planned for them that day. They may have even worried themselves

sick trying to find the ideal place for this last Passover. The Lord has a special plan for us as well. Like these disciples we need to consult the Lord and seek His purpose.

Down to the last detail, the disciples found everything to be exactly as the Lord had told them. I can imagine how amazed they must have been at the way the Lord led them that day. The disciples understood the truth of the Law of God about the Passover and what was required but they also took the time to seek the Lord's special direction for that particular celebration. That same principle applies today as well. God has not only given us His Word as a guide but His Holy Spirit as our Counsellor to lead us in the application of that truth in specific situations we encounter each day.

The Lord Jesus wants to show us particularly how to apply the truth He has revealed to us. His Holy Spirit will lead us to people with whom He would have us share that truth. He will point to specific ways in our lives where we need to apply that truth in new and fresh ways. How important it is that we not only understand the truth of God's Word but that we, like the disciples, take the time to ask Him how He wants us to apply that truth.

For Consideration:

- What is the difference between knowing the Word of God and listening to His special leading in its application? Is it possible to learn the truths and doctrines of Scripture and not be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in their specific application?

- How important is it that we take the time to seek the Lord about how He wants us to apply the truth of His Word? Has the Lord ever specifically led you in applying the truth He taught you in the Word? Explain.
- What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the understanding and application of Scripture?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have not sought His wisdom on the specific application of the Word in your situation.
- Ask the Lord to open your mind and heart to His direction in your life.
- Thank the Lord for the way He promises to lead and direct you. Thank Him for the Holy Spirit who is our Guide in applying the truth of the Scriptures to our lives.



## 24

### THE BETRAYER

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Read Mathew 26:20-25; Mark 14:17-21

The disciples were preparing for the Passover. The Lord Jesus had led them to the home where that celebration was to take place. They were now gathered together in the presence of Jesus to eat the Passover meal.

During the course of this evening meal, Jesus told His disciples that one of them would betray Him. The betrayer was even then eating with them.

The disciples immediately began to say to Him and to each other: "Surely, not I" (Matthew 26:22). The scene was one of unbelief. Everyone looked around the room to find out who it was that Jesus was speaking about. Everyone was feeling quite defensive. To ease the tension, Jesus told them that the person who would betray them was the one who dipped his hand in the bowl with Him. This act of dipping one's hand in the bowl was an act of friendship. What Jesus is saying is that one of His friends would betray Him.

Jesus saw something that none of the other disciples saw. There was a betrayer in their midst. This betrayer ate with them and ministered with them but he was not really one of them. Even as they looked around that day the disciples did not see who it was. How we need the wisdom and discernment in the work of ministry. We are blind without the leading, direction and wisdom of the Lord.

Jesus had a warning for the betrayer. He told him that what he was about to do was written and determined long ago. God knew what the betrayer would do and would use it to bring His salvation to the world. This did not excuse the person who betrayed Jesus. The betrayer would pay the price for His actions. The penalty for His betrayal was very high. Jesus told him that it would be better if he had never been born.

God can use sin to accomplish good. He is able to take terrible evil and change it to good. The crucifixion is a clear example of this. Satan lashed out with His evil, lies and murder to kill the Lord Jesus but God used all this to bring about our salvation. This does not make God party to evil. While He can change evil to good He is not part of the evil. He took your life of sin and made it into something wonderful. He took your ugly past and made it into something useful for His kingdom. He can take your mistakes and bad judgments and mend them so that they are used for the greater good.

Just because God can fix the mess we have made does not mean that we can do what we want. Judas would pay a very high price for His betrayal. While God can bring good out of our situation sometimes the trusting relationships we once had are gone. God can use our failures but that does not always remove the damage done as a result

of our actions. Sometimes we will have to live with this on our conscience.

Some time ago I had the privilege of speaking at a conference for one hundred and fifty pastors and Christian workers in a national prison in the Philippines. From the inmates in this prison, God was raising up men who would lead the ten churches that had been planted in the large prison complex. These men were in prison for major crimes against humanity. They would live with the memory of what they had done for the rest of their lives. The damage done would never be completely restored. Murdered victims could never be returned to their families. Those who had been violated would never be the same. Lost years ruined on drugs they had sold would never be restored. While all this would remain on the conscience of these men, God's grace was also being manifested in their lives. He was raising up men and entrusting them with a mission in their prison. He was calling some to be pastors to minister to fellow inmates. They would be used of God in a special way. Their experiences would help them to minister in a special way to other prisoners. There was grace and forgiveness, but they still were in prison for life. They would be required to pay for their crimes, but they would also know God's special grace in saving, calling and using them despite their failures. While God forgives and uses even our failures, there is still a price to pay for our actions. Judas would pay a serious price for betraying the Lord Jesus.

Notice in Matthew 26:25 that Judas was among those who cried out: "Surely not I?" In saying this he simply proved that he was a deceiver. He would soon be revealed. His sin would not remain hidden for long. God would expose him and he would pay the price for His betrayal.

## For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about God's sovereignty over evil? What comfort do you take from this?
- How has God used evil situations in your life for good?
- Are there things in your past you wish you could change? What comfort do you find in the Lord and in what we have seen in this chapter?

## For Prayer:

- Thank God that He is a sovereign God.
- Thank the Lord for the times He has forgiven and used you despite your faults.
- What do you need to change in your life? Ask God to give you victory.
- Ask God to give you victory over the horrible memory and failures of your past.

## 25

### THE LORD'S SUPPER

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Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23

As the disciples gathered around the Passover table, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to His disciples. He told them that this was His body that was broken for them. He also took a cup, gave thanks for it and gave it to them to drink. Jesus told them that this was the blood of the covenant that was poured out for the forgiveness of the sins of many. There are several important details we need to examine in these words of Jesus.

Jesus told His disciples that the bread they ate was His body that was broken for them. We should not see here that this was the literal body of the Lord Jesus. Jesus is speaking symbolically. He was explaining to His disciples that He was going to die. Jesus often illustrated His lessons with everyday examples. Here He compared Himself to a loaf of bread.

Jesus took the bread as a symbol of His life and broke it showing His disciples that He would be broken like that bread. What we need to understand here is that though

the bread was broken it still gave life to all who ate it. We break bread so we can eat it. This is why Jesus was broken. He was broken so that we could have life as we believe and trust in Him. Jesus, the Bread of Life, gives us life. Jesus was telling His disciples that He would be broken so that they could live. This would have been very difficult for the disciples to understand.

Jesus also told His disciples that the cup He offered them was a symbol of His blood that was poured out for many. The blood of Jesus would be poured out at the cross. The blood reminds us of the cruelty of His death. It also reminds us of the high cost of the sacrifice that was made for our sins. Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we remind ourselves of how much the Lord Jesus was willing to pay. He shed His blood and laid down His life for our forgiveness.

Notice something else here. Jesus spoke of His blood as "the blood of the covenant." In other words, this blood sealed an agreement between God and His people. By going to the cross, the Lord Jesus was sealing a covenant agreement between God and humanity. With the shedding of His blood came the promise of absolute forgiveness of sins and the salvation of all who would come under that covenant. On the day of the first Passover in Egypt a lamb was killed and the blood placed on the doorposts of the homes. When the angel of death passed over the land and saw the blood, that home was spared from the judgment of God. The covenant promise is this, that all who come under the blood of Jesus today will be forgiven and spared from the judgment of God. The blood of Christ sealed this agreement between human beings and God. Nothing can ever change that covenant agreement. All who trust in the Lord Jesus when He shed His blood as a sacrifice for our sin will be forgiven and know the salvation of God.

Notice how Jesus called His disciples to take the cup and drink. This cannot go unnoticed. By drinking of this cup they were identifying with Jesus' death. A covenant is a mutual agreement between two parties. Jesus was guaranteeing us a salvation and victory over sin. By drinking the symbol of His blood, the disciples chose to accept the terms of that salvation. They chose to take up their crosses to follow Him. They were identifying and accepting the work of the Lord Jesus on their behalf.

Jesus told His disciples that He had been looking forward to the time when He would share this table with them. He told them that this would be the last time He would share a meal with them until they were together in His Father's kingdom.

The Lord's Supper is filled with symbolism. The bread represents His body. That body was broken for us. The cup represents His blood. It reminds us of the cruelty of the sacrifice but also of the seriousness of our sin. It is also a powerful reminder of the wonderful mercy of God in forgiving us at such great cost. The cup, which symbolizes Christ's blood, is also a reminder of the covenant promise that Christ has made. He promised, at the cost of His death, that He would provide us with salvation and victory over sin. By partaking of the bread and the cup we are identifying with the work of Christ. By partaking not only do we identify with Christ's work but we recommit ourselves to living in light of His work on our behalf. Those who take part in this symbol must consider their response to Christ in light of what He has done for them.

It should be remembered here that this first celebration of the Lord's Supper took place before the Lord died. This first celebration was an announcement of what would happen. It would serve to help the disciples understand more

fully the nature of the death of the Lord Jesus in the coming days.

#### For Consideration:

- What is a covenant? What covenant agreement did Jesus make with us when He laid down His life on the cross?
- How does eating the bread and drinking the cup show that we are in agreement with the covenant that Jesus has made? What is our covenant obligation toward the Lord Jesus now that He has died for the forgiveness of our sin?
- Will you be among those who are seated at the banquet table in heaven? How do you know?

#### For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He has sealed His promise to you with His blood. Thank Him that He was willing to lay down His life.
- Ask the Lord to enable you to be faithful to your side of the covenant He has made with you. Ask Him to show you clearly what your role needs to be.
- Thank the Lord for the wonderful hope He has given all who trust in him.

- If you do not have the assurance of your salvation, take a moment right now and open your heart to him. Recognize that you have sinned and receive the pardon the Lord offers you through His death on the cross.



## 26

### WHO IS THE GREATEST?

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Read Luke 22:24-30

The disciples had their faults. There was still much work to be done in their lives. The Holy Spirit would continue the work that the Lord Jesus had begun in them. At this time they were still very rough. In this next passage, Luke described a dispute that took place between the disciples. Satan was likely trying to sow seeds of discord among them.

The dispute erupted over who was the greatest among them. The dispute seemed rather childish, but so are many divisions that come between believers. Satan knows how much we want approval and a sense of significance. How often have we tried to outdo our fellow workers? We want to have the biggest church. We want to have the most decisions for Christ. I have been in meetings with pastors where the discussion revolved around all the successes they had. The temptation to want to be at the top is very real. Be assured that the enemy will use this for His own advantage.

Jesus listened to the disciples for a moment and then interrupted them. He told them that the kings of the Gentiles ruled over their subjects in this way. Jesus told His disciples that the type of behaviour He was seeing among them would be expected in unbelievers but they were to live by a different standard. He told them in Luke 22:26 that the greatest among them should be like the youngest. The one who ruled was to be like the one who served. This was a very difficult concept for the disciples to grasp. They had been so used to the worldly system that Jesus' concept of greatness was foreign to them.

This concept is still foreign to us in our day. When we think "great" we don't think of a little child. When we think "ruler" we don't think servant. To be great in the kingdom of God we must have the humility and trust of a little child. The greatest among us is one who recognizes his or her inability and inexperience but is willing to step out in humble confidence in the Heavenly Father. We have met individuals with great faith in the Lord God. Their names are not painted on bulletin boards across the nation but they are giants of faith and confidence in God. If you want to be great in the kingdom of God you need to learn how to trust in the Lord and not in your own wisdom. You will have to come to Him with nothing and draw everything you have from Him like a helpless little child.

Jesus went on to say that the rulers among them needed to be like a servant. They needed to learn how to lead by example. Jesus lived the Christian life among us. He didn't sit back and let others serve Him. He served them. This took Him to the cross. If you are a true leader you will be a strong servant. All too many church leaders serve for the glory and honour their position gives. They put on their Sunday clothes and stand before the people but they do not reach down like Jesus and wash the feet of those they

minister to. These are not true leaders. Jesus is the perfect example of a true leader. If you aspire to be a leader, follow His example. Get down from the pulpit and take up a washing cloth and minister like Jesus did.

In Luke 22:28, Jesus reminded His disciples of how they had stood with Him through His trials and tribulations. They had been by His side all the way. He would soon leave them. In His absence, He was going to give to them a leadership role in the kingdom. They would sit at His table as joint rulers in that kingdom. They would be given the responsibility to judge the twelve tribes representing the children of God. They shared in the honour of sitting at His table and they would also share in the honour of representing Him before His people. Those who sit at the table are those who are in an intimate relationship with God. They know Him personally and communicate with him. It is because they are seated at this table in intimate communion with their God that they are able to represent Him in this world. They are able to serve Him because they know Him so intimately and sit regularly at His table. If you want to be a good leader you also need to know the Lord and His purposes intimately. To represent Him you must know Him deeply. This requires time with Him in His Word and in prayer. The good leader is a servant. A good leader also knows the Lord and spends time in fellowship with Him.

True Christian leaders, like little children, recognize their dependence on God. They are not proud. Like the Lord Jesus, they demonstrate leadership by being humble servants. They sit at His table and fellowship regularly with Him. Does this describe your leadership style?

## For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about true leadership?
- What are the qualifications of the true leader according to the Lord Jesus in this passage?
- How does a Christian leader differ from a worldly leader?
- Have you ever been tempted to make yourself look good before others? How does this reveal itself in your ministry?
- How important is it for a leader to know the Lord intimately? Explain.

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have desired to be great from a worldly standing instead of being a servant leader.
- Thank the Lord for the way He demonstrated a servant attitude while here on earth. Ask Him to give you that same heart.
- Ask the Lord to increase your desire to know Him intimately. Thank Him that He wants to sit down at the table and commune with you in a very deep and intimate way. Ask Him to help you to know Him more.

## PETER'S DENIAL FORETOLD

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Read Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-38

Jesus had just told His disciples that one of them would betray Him. This sent shockwaves through the group. In this next passage, Jesus made yet another shocking announcement.

Jesus began by telling His disciples that they would all fall away from Him. This statement is all the more powerful in light of their discussion about who was the greatest among them about who was the greatest. The disciples appeared to be quite confident in themselves. Jesus saw them for who they really were. It is quite easy to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Sometimes we are more surprised than anyone to see our own sinfulness. This news that they would all fall away would have been very difficult for the disciples to understand. They had taken the news about a betrayer in their midst quite hard. Perhaps there was a judgmental spirit in their hearts toward this individual. To hear Jesus say that they were going to fall themselves would have certainly taken them by surprise.

We really do not understand what is deep down in our hearts until it is too late. How many times have we spoken words we regretted? Later we wonder where these words came from. They were there in our hearts all along. We cannot afford to let down our guard. Satan is not ignorant of our weaknesses. He knows the evil of our human nature and will do all he can to bring it to the surface.

Notice in Matthew 26:31 that Jesus told His disciples that they would fall that very night. This had been quite a wonderful night. They had been eating the Passover meal with Jesus. They were reclining at the table with Him and enjoying wonderful fellowship together. What a surprise it was to find out that they would fall away from Him that very night. It did not seem possible. That would have been the last thing they expected. None of us really ever expect to fall. It is within each of us, however, to be tempted and yield to those temptations.

Jesus told His disciples that this falling away was written about by the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 13:7). A shepherd would be struck and the sheep would scatter. Jesus was the shepherd. When He was arrested, His disciples would abandon Him. It was relatively easy to be faithful when they were sitting with Him enjoying great fellowship and food. When the enemy invaded, their lives were threatened and Jesus seemed distant, they all fell.

While Jesus would be taken from them and killed, He told them that He would rise and go ahead of them to Galilee (Matthew 26:32). We can only imagine how difficult this would have been for the disciples to understand. While His words did not make sense to them at that time, Jesus gave this word so that when the time came they would know what to do.

Peter in particular felt insulted by what the Lord Jesus told them that evening. He told Jesus that even if every other disciple fell away he would not. These were bold words from the lips of a man who was confident in himself. Maybe you feel somewhat like Peter. How easy it is to look at others with a judgmental and critical attitude that says, "I would never do that" or "I would never have fallen like that." Somehow we feel so confident in ourselves. The writer to the Proverbs warns us however in Proverbs 16:18 that "pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

A chain can be strong in every link but one. If there is one weak link in your chain, when the enemy starts pulling, it will break no matter how strong all the other links are. All it takes is one weak link and you will fall just like your brother or sister. You are only as strong as the weakest link in your chain. As strong and bold as Peter was, he had His weaknesses. When Satan pulled on His chain he fell just like the others.

Jesus knew what was in store for Peter. His words were powerful, but he would go down much quicker than he thought. Jesus told Peter that Satan was after him. Satan wanted to "sift" him like wheat (Luke 22:31). The process of sifting was not a pleasant one. What Jesus was telling Peter was that Satan wanted to violently shake and agitate him. He wanted to work him over. Notice that, in order for Satan to do this, he needed permission. Jesus told Peter that Satan had submitted His request to shake and sift Peter. We see the same thing in the life of Job. Satan asks God for permission to "sift" Job. That permission was granted (see Job 1:6-12).

God allowed Satan to "sift" Peter but Jesus told Peter that He had prayed for him so that His faith would not fail. God

allows us to go through suffering and trial but He will not leave us. Notice that Jesus told Peter that when he got through His trial he was to return and strengthen His brothers. There is an important point here for us to examine.

While Peter would have to face the trial of His faith, the Lord Jesus was praying for him. The prayers of the Lord Jesus would sustain him. More than sustain him, however, those prayers would keep him and strengthen him in this trial. This trial would ultimately equip him so that when he came through, he would be able to strengthen His brothers and sisters. He would be a better person for the trial. While Satan did His best to destroy the faith of Peter, God kept him so that Satan's efforts only served to strengthen and prepared him for greater service in the kingdom. Be assured that God is doing this in you as well.

Peter did not seem to be shaken by what the Lord said to him. He told Jesus that he was ready to go to prison for Him. He was willing even to die for His cause. Not even this word from Jesus seemed to shake Peter's confidence in himself. This was the very thing that God was going to break in Peter. Peter was too sure of himself. Peter's denial of Jesus would break His confidence in himself and make him a more effective servant. Sometimes God needs to use difficult methods to change us but the end result is always greater intimacy and fruitfulness.

Jesus told Peter that before the night was over he would deny Him not once but three times. Even though Jesus told him it would happen, Peter did not believe what Jesus said. He held firmly to His belief that he would never deny Jesus. The other disciples also told Jesus that they would never deny Him or fall away. They would be in for a big surprise.

As we examine this section of Scripture, we see how easy it is for us to be confident in our abilities and our strengths. Even those who were closest to the Lord Jesus fell. This passage is a warning to us. How easy it would be for us to fall just like these disciples. We need to be constantly on our guard and relying on His strength if we are to live faithfully in His purposes.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about putting confidence in ourselves?
- How easy would it be for you to fall?
- What are the areas of your greatest weakness? What needs to happen for those areas to be strengthened?
- What do we learn here about how the Lord is able to strengthen and equip us even though our failures, trials and suffering?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to reveal to you where your weaknesses lie. Ask Him to show you how to strengthen those areas so that you do not fall.
- Thank the Lord that He can use even the efforts of Satan to strengthen and equip us in service.

- Are you facing a trial right now? Take a moment to recognize that the Lord will use this in your life to strengthen and draw you closer to Him. Thank Him that He is sovereign over your situations. Thank Him that He will use your trial for good.

## 28

### PROVISIONS

### FOR THE JOURNEY

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Read Luke 22:35-38

In Luke 10, the Lord sent out 72 disciples on a mission trip. On that occasion, He told them that they were not to take a purse, bag or sandals. They were not to greet anyone on the way. There was a reason for this. The Lord wanted them to learn how to trust in His provision and guidance. Here in Luke 22, the Lord asked His disciples about that time. "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything," Jesus asked in Luke 22:35. The Lord God had provided all their needs as they went out on this mission. They did not lack anything.

The Lord then told them that when they went out this time they were to take a purse, bag and if they didn't have a sword they were to sell their cloak and buy one. This tells us how much things had changed. The sword was to be used for self-defence. The faith the disciples professed would no longer be accepted. They would have to face

many enemies as they shared the truth about Jesus and His love.

Jesus is not advocating the use of force in the preaching of the Gospel. In fact, He taught that believers were to turn the other cheek when they were insulted or hurt. What He was saying to His disciples was that they would be forced, in these difficult times, to take measures to protect themselves and their possessions. Let's take a moment to consider what Jesus is telling His disciples here.

By taking a purse for their journey, these disciples were making provision for their future needs. They were planning ahead. While God is fully able to provide for all our future needs, we do not sin by setting aside what He has already given us for our future needs. This is the teaching of Proverbs 6:6-8:

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.

The writer of the proverb commends the ant for the wisdom in gathering up provisions when they were available and storing them up for times of need. The apostle Paul took advantage of opportunities to work as a tent maker to make money for His future ministry.

By taking a sword for their journey these disciples were also making provision for their safety. While God is fully able to protect what He has entrusted into our care, He also asks us, as good stewards to do all we can to care for these things as well.

Jesus was telling His disciples to take the necessary precautions for their future because the days would be evil. Even now the enemy was preparing to arrest Jesus. He would soon be taken away.

When the disciples heard what Jesus was telling them, they told the Lord that they had two swords with them. Jesus told them that was enough. What is interesting to note is that when Jesus was arrested He told His disciples to put away their swords (Luke 22:50-51). There was a time to protect themselves and there was a time to surrender to the will and purpose of God.

What do we learn here in this passage? We see that there are times when the Lord calls us to surrender everything and trust in Him for our provisions and protection. There are other times when He calls us to make every provision for our future. God's provision can come in different ways. To wisely invest our resources for the future is not to distrust God. In this passage, the Lord told His disciples to take a purse and a bag. They stored their money in the purse and their clothes in the bag. The Lord challenged them to make the necessary arrangements and provisions for their future. How easy it is to look at those who have stored up for the future and accuse them of not trusting the Lord. This passage challenges us to reconsider this. If God has blessed you with provisions for the future now, praise Him for it. If He has not blessed you with those provisions, trust Him. Ultimately it really does not matter how the Lord provides. What is important is that we understand that He will.

## For Consideration:

- Have you seen the Lord provide for your needs? Give some examples of this provision.
- What do we learn about the different ways God provides?
- How has the Lord chosen to provide for you? Has He blessed you with provisions now or has He chosen to have you trust Him moment by moment for those provisions?
- Why does Jesus tell His disciples to take up their swords in this passage? When is it right for us to defend ourselves as believers?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to maintain a godly attitude toward those who have more resources than you.
- Thank the Lord that He does provide for us in different ways.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be wise with the resources He has given you.

## 29

### JESUS' PRAYER AT GETHSEMANE

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Read Matthew 26:30-46; Mark 14:26-42; Luke 22:39-46

The last evening with Jesus around the table had been very difficult. Jesus told His disciples that Judas would betray them. He told them that before the night was over they would all abandon Him and Peter would deny Him three times. He told them that this was the last Passover He would spend with them on earth. We can imagine the mixed emotions of the disciples that evening.

Matthew tells us that when they had sung a hymn, they left the upper room and went to the Mount of Olives. Luke explains that this was a usual place for the Lord to go with His disciples. In this instance, the Lord went to the Mount of Olives to spend time in prayer.

Before going to a solitary place to be with His Father, Jesus reminded His disciples of what He had already told them around the table. He told them that in just a few hours they would fall away from Him. This would be in fulfillment

of the prophecy spoken by Zechariah the prophet who said that when the Shepherd was struck the sheep would be scattered (see Zechariah 13:7). He told them that He would rise from the dead. They were to go ahead of Him to Galilee where He would meet them. Again this would have been a very difficult for the disciples to understand.

Peter seemed to be the loudest voice in opposition to what the Lord Jesus was telling them that night. He told the Lord a second time that even though everyone else denied Him he would never deny Him. He was confident in himself and his ability to persevere and face whatever trial came his way. Peter seriously doubted what the Lord was saying. Jesus told him again that he would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed. Peter insisted that this would not be the case (Matthew 26:34). He told Jesus that he was willing to lay down his life for Him. He would never disown Him. The disciples all agreed with Peter. Nothing would make them deny their Lord and Master.

They arrived at a place called Gethsemane and Jesus told the disciples to stay there while He went off alone to pray. He took Peter, James and John with Him a little farther. When He had put some distance between Himself and the other disciples, the Lord's heart became more sorrowful and troubled.

There is something else we need to see in this passage. These three men were closer to the Lord Jesus than the others. Often the Lord would take them aside and minister to them or show them things He did not show the others. They seemed to have a special place in the Lord's heart. Jesus seemed to reveal Himself more to these three men than to the others.

We are not told how long the Lord stayed with Peter, James and John, but the intensity of His struggle seemed to increase. His sorrow was now to the point of death. He asked them to stay there and keep watch with Him. What did the Lord mean when He told the disciples to keep watch? In Luke 22:40, we read that Jesus told them to pray that they would not fall into temptation. It seems that the Lord was calling these disciples to prayer and intercession. The enemy was coming and would soon be on them. They were to commit themselves to seeking the Lord God and His strength at this time.

In His time of sorrow, Jesus called three of His closest disciples and asked them to pray for Him and for themselves. If the Lord needed the prayers of His disciples at that time surely we too need the prayers of our brothers and sisters in our time of need as well. In His time of need, the Lord Jesus called His closest disciples aside to minister to Him in prayer. There will be times when we will need to do the same.

It is important that we take a moment to examine this sorrow of the Lord Jesus. Notice that when the Lord left the three disciples, He fell to the ground and cried out alone to His Father. Jesus faced the battle in prayer. He had asked His disciples to pray but now He was alone with His Father. There is a time to join others but we must also have that personal time with God alone in quiet and solitude.

Notice that Jesus asked the Father to take the cup from Him if it was possible. The reality of the matter is that with God all things are possible. Jesus is not speaking about God's ability; He is speaking about His will and purpose. He knew the Father could do all things but He also knew that not all things were in God's purpose and plan. The agony of the cross and the Father turning His back on Him

grieved the heart of Jesus. He asked God to take it away but He would not shrink back from it.

In this time of trouble Jesus had His eyes always on His Father. He desired His Father's will and purpose. Yet here before us we see Jesus with a grieving soul. His heart was sorrowful. It appears that the joy of the Spirit was hidden from Him at this time. It is quite possible to be in tune with God and His purposes and still be sorrowful in heart. There are times when the joy of the Lord is hidden and the peace of God just does not seem present. Even sincere and godly believers may have to face overwhelming trials in life. Despite His sorrow and grief, the heart cry of the Lord Jesus was that the will of the Father be done.

After praying for some time, the Lord returned to His disciples. He found them sleeping. He rebuked them because they were not watching with Him in prayer and reminded them that while the spirit was willing the flesh was weak (Matthew 26:41). These feeble bodies are weak and frail. Our minds become tired and unable to focus. This was the struggle the disciples were facing at that time. They wanted to pray but they were simply too tired. As believers, we need to take care of our bodies, giving them the sleep and exercise they need so they will be strong for the work of the kingdom. Jesus told the disciples to continue to watch and pray with Him and returned to be alone again with His father.

Why would He stop praying to go and see His disciples? We do not have a clear answer in the passage. We do know, however, that when He went to see His disciples, Jesus woke them up and told them to pray with Him. Could it be that their prayers were more important than they realized? Did Jesus feel the lack of prayer support as He wrestled with the Father? What is clear is that He needed

the prayers of the disciples and so He took the time to wake them up so that they could join Him in His hour of need. This shows us the importance of prayer support in the difficulties we face and the ministry we undertake for the Lord God. If we are to be effective we need to commit our ways to the Lord ourselves but we also need men and women who will stand with us as we move forward in God's purpose and plan. Do you have a team of prayer supporters who stand with you?

After challenging His disciples to watch and pray, the Lord Jesus returned to His Father. He committed Himself to do the will of the Father. As Jesus wrestled in pray, an angel was sent to minister to Him (Luke 22:43). We are not told what the angel did but the result was that Jesus was strengthened. This did not take away the agony He faced but He found strength and courage to face what was ahead. As Jesus wrestled with the thought of what was ahead, His sweat fell like drops of blood from His body. The emotional and spiritual struggle was very intense.

Again it is important that we see how Jesus, filled with the Spirit of God, wrestled so intensely with the will of the Father. We often feel that there should never be any struggle for the believer who is filled with the Spirit of God. We do not see the life of the Spirit as one that is filled with deep emotional and spiritual pain and agony. Somehow we have come to believe that if we are filled with the Spirit of God, all will be joy, peace and rest. This is not always the case. Jesus demonstrates this clearly to us in this passage.

Rising from prayer, Jesus returned to His disciples. Once again He found them sleeping. To be fair to the disciples, Luke tells us that they were exhausted from sorrow (Luke

22:45). These disciples were so overwhelmed by the events of that night that their bodies were exhausted.

Jesus went back a third time to pray and prayed the same thing He prayed the first two times. Again when He returned, He found the disciples sleeping. He awoke them and told them that His hour had come. His betrayer was coming. Nothing of the events that unfolded in those days took the Lord Jesus by surprise. This did not take the pain away. Though He knew what was ahead, He still agonized at the thought of what He was going to have to face.

There are times when we too will wrestle with the will of God for our lives. Jesus wrestled with the plan of God but that did not mean that He hesitated to follow His will. His heart was totally committed to following God to the end but that did not remove the pain and struggle. To wrestle does not mean that we are doubting or shrinking back. We can wrestle and still be totally committed to the purpose and will of our Father.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about how difficult it is sometimes to line up our will with the will of the Father?
- What do we learn here about the importance of finding others to join us in prayer in those times when we wrestle with the purpose of God?
- Have you ever wrestled with what God was asking you to do? Explain.

- Does wrestling with God's purpose mean that we are not committed to doing God's will?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to surrender afresh to the Lord and His purposes for your life.
- Ask the Lord to remove any obstacle that keeps you from doing His will.
- Thank the Lord for those who have stood behind you in prayer for your spiritual walk and ministry.
- Ask God to give you grace to be obedient even when you wrestle with His purpose and will.



## 30

# JESUS IS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED

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Read Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53

Jesus has just been agonizing in prayer over the suffering that He was about to endure. After His intense time of prayer, Jesus went back to speak with His disciples. As they were speaking, Judas arrived in the Garden. He was accompanied by a large crowd armed with swords and clubs. This crowd had been sent by the chief priests and elders.

Judas approached Jesus and kissed Him. It had been pre-arranged that Judas would do this as a sign to the crowd. The man he kissed was the one they were to arrest. Jesus commented on this in Luke 22:48 when He said, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" How shocking it was to see that the very symbol of intimacy and closeness should be the means by which Judas would betray the Lord Jesus. Notice in Matthew 26:50 that Jesus calls Judas "friend." There is no bitterness toward Judas for betraying Him. His love for this man remained.

With this sign, the crowd stepped forward to seize Jesus. When this happened one of the disciples reached for His sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off His ear. Jesus reprimanded His disciple. He reminded those present that all who lived by the sword would die by the sword. It was not God's intention that this battle be fought with swords. Jesus told them that if He wanted, He could call twelve legions of angels. All the forces of heaven were at Jesus' disposal that day. The image is quite striking. This disciple strikes out with His sword against the multitude while twelve legions of angels were at His disposal. How often we lean on our own strength like this disciple. We feel that we need to defend the Lord and protect His name and His honour. The Lord is fully able to defend Himself.

The disciple who struck the high priest's servant was only making matters worse by drawing His sword. Not only did this disciple not understand the power at Jesus' disposal but he was fighting against the purpose of God. Jesus reminded His disciples this very moment had been prophesied in the Scriptures. It was God's will from the very beginning that He be arrested and killed.

I wonder how many times we have found ourselves in the position of this disciple. Thinking we are doing right we can sometimes fight against the purpose of God. How often have we felt that all God had at His disposal was our frail human strength and wisdom? Sometimes we act as if everything depends on us. We take up our weapons and defend His cause as if we were His last hope. Our opinion of God is sometimes not big enough. We forget that God is bigger than all our problems or all the slander and blasphemy that surrounds us.

After rebuking the disciple who swung His sword, Jesus healed the man's ear. Again we see His compassion on the ones who were trying to arrest Him. We can only imagine what this particular servant thought. Would he have been so aggressive in seeking the arrest of Jesus after that incident? What is important is that we see that Jesus ministers even to those who seek Him harm. He leaves us an example to follow.

Speaking to the crowd, Jesus said in Matthew 26:55:

Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me.

He asked them why they came at Him now with swords and clubs. He had been with them every day in the temple but they never arrested Him. They arrested Him here because there were no people. They were afraid of the response of the people. Jesus again reminded those present that all these details were prophesied in the Scriptures. The prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures seemed to bring Jesus great comfort at this time. He is strengthened by them as they showed Him that He was in the will of His Father.

As Jesus spoke, something was happening in the hearts and minds of the disciples. They realized that they were in serious danger. This crowd meant business. As every eye was focused on the Lord Jesus, the disciples took advantage of the opportunity and fled. They left Him to deal with the crowd by Himself.

Mark 14:51 tells us about one of the disciples who fled. As he was being pursued, someone managed to grab him by

His linen garment. As they held him, he slipped out of His clothes and fled away naked into the dark. While this story is quite amusing, it also shows us the terror that was in the heart of this disciple.

Just as Jesus had prophesied, every one of His disciples abandoned Him in His hour of need. Words are very easy to speak but the reality is much different. It is easy to say that we will be faithful but when the struggle comes, words are not enough. We also see how easy it is to take matters into our own hands like the disciple who cut off the servant's ear. His action did not help anything. His action only proved that he did not trust the Lord. It also proved that he did not understand that there was a power far greater than His in control of the situation.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the difference between how God sees things and how we see them? What encouragement do you take from this?
- Have you ever found yourself believing that somehow God would be helpless without you? What does this tell us about our view of God?
- We have a comparison here between the disciple's sword and the twelve legions of angels at the Lord's disposal. What does this teach us about the difference between human strength and the power of God? What do you trust in today?
- What is the difference between words of the disciples and their actions in this passage?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is in control of your situation.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times when you have trusted in your sword and not surrendered to His purpose.
- Thank the Lord that He can take the most tragic circumstance and do something wonderful through it.



# 31

## JESUS' TRIAL AND PETER'S DENIAL

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Read Matthew 26:57-75; Mark 14:53-72; Luke 22:54-71

Jesus has just been arrested. As He had prophesied, all His disciples abandoned Him at this crucial time. Jesus was brought to Caiaphas, the high priest. The elders and the teachers of the law wasted no time in assembling. They were quite anxious to get rid of Jesus.

Peter followed the crowd at a distance. While he obviously did not want to be seen, he wanted to see what would happen to Jesus. He followed Jesus and the crowd right up to the courtyard. He entered the courtyard without being noticed and sat down with the guards. If there is one thing we can say about Peter it is that he seems to be quite bold and daring. He was certainly taking a risk. While the other disciples abandoned Jesus and did not dare to come to the courtyard, Peter took a chance. He sat down beside the fire warming himself and waiting to see what would happen.

Luke tells us that as Peter sat by the fire, a servant girl recognized him as one of Jesus' disciples. Peter denied this and told everyone present that he did not know Jesus. Sometime later someone else noticed Peter and said, "you are one of them" (Luke 22: 58). Again Peter denied the charge. Finally, about an hour later, a third person made the same accusation. For the third time, Peter denied any association with Jesus.

When he had disowned the Lord the third time, Peter heard the rooster crow. Jesus also heard the rooster and turned to look directly at Peter (Luke 22:61). We can only imagine what that look did for Peter. Immediately he was reminded of what the Lord had told him about denying him three times. He ran out of the courtyard a broken man. Luke tells us that he wept bitterly (Luke 22:62).

This was probably one of the most difficult lessons Peter ever had to learn. It was probably also one of the most important lessons he had to learn. That day Peter realized that this own strength would fail. He had disowned the one he had vowed to serve. He was humbled. He had been a bold and fearless man to that point but he fell. His confidence was His downfall.

Let's turn our attention now to what was happening with the Lord Jesus at this time. We are told that the chief priests and the Sanhedrin (governing council) were looking for false evidence against Jesus. They did not have anything against Him to merit a death sentence. They could not even find a believable false accusation against Him that would condemn Him to death. While many false witnesses came forward, there was not enough evidence to make an accusation. The witnesses themselves could not agree. We see here the state of the Jewish faith at this

time. When the spiritual leaders resort to lies and deceit to condemn an innocent man, there is a real problem.

Finally two men came forward with a believable accusation. They told the leaders that Jesus had said He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Mark 14:59 tells us that, even in making this statement, the men could not agree. In any normal court of law the case would have been thrown out for lack of evidence. This was no normal court of law. They were not going to stop until they had found an accusation that would stick.

The high priest stood up and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" (Matthew 26:62). Jesus did not answer. He could have told him what He meant by the statement. He did not mean that He would break down the earthly temple and rebuild it in three days. In speaking of the temple, He was referring to His own body as the temple of God. This body would be destroyed and in three days raised to life again. Jesus knew that an explanation would not serve any purpose. These people were not ready to hear what He had to say. He remained silent.

In frustration, the high priest demanded that Jesus tell him if He was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said He was and told him that the day was coming when they would see Him sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming in the clouds of heaven. Jesus refers here to His second coming.

When the high priest heard this he tore His clothes in a sign of rage, accusing Jesus of blasphemy. Jesus had claimed in the presence of many witnesses that He was the Christ, the Son of God. For the high priest that was

enough to condemn Him to death. Jesus was accused of blasphemy. This was a crime punishable by death.

Immediately after His sentence the crowd began to mock and insult Jesus. They blindfolded Him, spat in His face and struck Him with their fists asking Him to prophesy to them and tell them who had hit Him. Jesus remained silent. They did not understand what they were doing.

What a tragic story. What is more tragic is that this same story is repeating itself over and over again in our day. Men and women still mock and insult Jesus not understanding that one day He will return as their judge. What a terrible day that will be for those who do not know Him. Even in our own lives as believers we have turned our backs on Him and His purposes. Like Peter, we have disowned Him by our words and actions. We have had times when we were ashamed to stand up and call Him our Saviour. We may not strike Him with our fists or spit in His face but we can still strike Him and wound Him by our words and attitudes? Before we are too quick to condemn these individuals let's take a quick look at ourselves.

For Consideration:

- What important lesson did Peter have to learn in this chapter? Is it possible for us to fall like Peter?
- Why is it dangerous to be confident in ourselves like Peter?
- How we can strike the Lord and disown Him even as believers? Have you ever been guilty of this?

- The Lord had to teach Peter a lesson that would cause deep pain in his life. What important lessons has the Lord taught you through difficulty and failure?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you if there is any way you too are guilty of disowning Him today?
- Thank the Lord for the way He has shown great kindness and compassion despite the fact that we have not always been faithful.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to be humble and to put your confidence in Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is able to use tragedy and difficulty in life to teach us important lessons. Ask Him to strip you of anything that would not bring Him glory and honour.



## JUDAS KILLS HIMSELF

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Read Matthew 27:1-10

From a human point of view, things were not looking well for Jesus. He had been tried by the chief priests and the elders of the people. They accused Him of blasphemy. They debated this issue among themselves. During this time Jesus was being beaten, mocked and ridiculed. It was early in the morning that the chief priests and elders came to the conclusion that they were going to put Jesus to death. The Jews did not have the authority to put someone to death. They needed the approval of Rome. With this in mind, the Jews bound Jesus and led Him away to Pilate the governor. We will examine what took place during Jesus' trial before Pilate at a later time.

Matthew focuses our attention on what took place with Judas. When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse. He went to the chief priests and elders and told them that he had sinned and that he had betrayed innocent blood. He no longer wanted anything to do with this blood money. He threw it on the floor and went out and hanged himself.

We have seen that one of Judas' weaknesses was money. He often stole from the money bag. It was through His love for money that Satan was able to gain an entrance into Judas' mind. Here in this verse we see Judas coming to realize that money was not the answer to everything in life. He was quite willing to betray the Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. When the deal was done, however, he saw how bitter it really was. He had His thirty pieces of silver but he had lost far more. His money did not give him peace and contentment. His money could not hide the bitterness and guilt he felt deep down inside. Judas wanted nothing more to do with it. It had left him bitter and empty.

The second thing we need to see here is how Satan disposes of Judas when he has finished with him. Satan cared nothing about Judas as a person. He cared nothing about the guilt and agony he felt in betraying Jesus. Satan simply used Judas and allowed him to kill himself when the task was over. This is how Satan works.

Notice that not only did Satan not care for the pain Judas was going through, neither did the religious leaders. When Judas came to them and confessed His guilt and told them he wanted nothing to do with this blood money, the religious leaders simply said, "What is that to us. That's your responsibility" (Matthew 27:5). They were children of their father the devil. They had the same attitude as Satan. They used and disposed of Judas when they had obtained what they wanted from him.

When Judas left the temple, the chief priests picked up the coins. They knew that it was against the law to put this money into the treasury so they decided to buy a field to bury foreigners with the money. They called it the "Field of Blood." Matthew reminds us that Jeremiah the prophet had prophesied that this would happen (Matthew 27:9-10).

I find it striking that the chief priests would be so concerned about how they used this money. These are the people who had accepted false testimonies against Jesus. They sought to kill an innocent man. They acted out of jealousy and bitterness of heart. All the time they were doing this they were still claiming to follow the law. They were blind to the truth. They would lie and deceive but they would not miss bringing their tithes to the temple. They were quite willing to murder an innocent man but they would not use blood money for temple service. They were faithful every day in the temple services but they cared nothing about Judas and His pain. The inconsistency is shocking. I wonder, however, if it is not all too common in our day as well.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn about Satan and how he uses people?
- What bitter lesson did Judas have to learn about money? What other things in life bring the same result?
- Are there inconsistencies in your life like those of the chief priests? What in particular?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to reveal any inconsistencies in your life and faith.
- Thank the Lord that He is able to satisfy in a way nothing in this world can satisfy.

- Thank the Lord for how He deeply loves us even when we wander from Him and are unfaithful to Him.

## JESUS BEFORE PILATE

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Read Matthew 27:11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5

Jesus had been arrested and sentenced by the chief priests and the elders. They found Him guilty of blasphemy. They judged Him on the basis of false testimony and incorrect interpretation of His teaching. In order to have the death sentence passed, they brought Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor at the time. It was early in the morning when this took place. They knew that Pilate, who cared very little for their religious beliefs, would not be concerned about their accusation of blasphemy. There was no death penalty in Roman law for claiming to be a Messiah.

In order to attract Pilate's attention, the chief priests and the elders had to change their accusation against Jesus. While they had accused Jesus of blasphemy, before Pilate they accused Him of subverting the nation. The word "subvert" means to sabotage or to undermine. This would have caught Pilate's attention. The Jews accused Jesus of political crimes in order to pass the death sentence. Again it is shocking to see the religious leaders stooping to such dishonesty to reach their goal of killing our Lord.

Notice the crimes the Jewish leaders claimed Jesus had committed. They accused Him of opposing the payment of taxes. This was an outright lie. Jesus clearly taught that His disciples were to pay taxes to Caesar (see Matthew 22:21). They also accused Him of claiming to be king. Jesus did claim to be king but not in the sense they were trying to present to Pilate. They were trying to convince Pilate that Jesus was a threat to Roman government. Jesus' kingdom was not a political kingdom. His was a spiritual kingdom in the hearts and lives of those who surrendered to His Father's authority.

These accusations seemed to get Pilate's attention. Pilate asked Jesus if He claimed to be king of the Jews. Jesus did not hesitate to tell him that He was.

Pilate listened more to the accusations of the chief priests and the elders. The more he listened the more he understood what was happening. Pilate watched the Jews accuse Jesus. He saw the bitterness and anger in their hearts. He also watched Jesus. He was quite astonished to see how Jesus said nothing through the whole process.

Pilate asked Jesus about His silence. "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of," he asked Jesus in Mark 15:4. Jesus remained silent. This amazed Pilate. He wondered why Jesus would remain silent with all these serious accusations being hurled at him. All these things made Pilate question what the Jews were doing. He did not see Jesus to be a threat. If Jesus was the threat these people said He was, it was not at all obvious in what Pilate saw that day. All Pilate saw was meekness and humility. This man could not possibly be a rebel. It was impossible for Pilate to understand how this man could be accused of undermining the nation. He wasn't

even defending himself. His quiet and gentle spirit proved to Pilate that the Jews were lying.

After listening to the accusations of the Jews, Pilate told them he could find no basis at all for sentencing this man to death. That statement should have ended the matter. Pilate's judgment had been passed. Jesus was found not guilty by Roman law.

The Jews would not accept Pilate's answer. They told Pilate that Jesus, the Galilean, was guilty of stirring up people all over the region of Judea, Galilee and in the city of Jerusalem. When Pilate heard that Jesus was a Galilean he decided to send Him to Herod. Galilee was under Herod's jurisdiction. Herod was in Jerusalem at the time so Pilate decided to have Herod consider the case.

Pilate knew that the Jews would not be satisfied until they had killed Jesus. Jesus bore their insults and accusations with patience and quietness of spirit. He knew He had to die but not because of the accusations of these Jews.

Jesus' patience through this trial is a powerful example for us. He was falsely accused but did not seek to defend Himself against those accusations. He knew it was the purpose of the father that He be killed. His silence is a silence of confidence in the will and purpose of His Father. He does or says nothing to hinder that purpose. How important it is that we too learn to accept the will and purpose of our heavenly Father for our lives as well.

## For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the religious leadership of Jesus' day? How would you describe them in terms of their sincerity and morality?
- What example do you find here in the trial of Jesus? Is it possible that we could sometimes be fighting against the will and purpose of the father in the struggles that come our way?
- Have you accepted your suffering as Jesus accepted His? What is the temptation for you when you are falsely accused?
- Is there a time when we are to let evil take its course? Do we always have to fight evil? Consider the example of the trial of Jesus and the false accusations that were made against Him.

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you the quiet and gentle spirit of Jesus in your suffering.
- Thank the Lord that He was willing to go to the cross for you.
- Ask the Lord to help you to live for Him no matter what comes your way.
- Thank the Lord that He is sovereign over sin and evil and that He can use what others do to us to accomplish His purpose.

## 34

# JESUS STANDS BEFORE HEROD

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Read Luke 23:6-12

In the last meditation, we saw how Pilate could not find any reason to accuse Jesus. Seeing that Jesus was from the region of Galilee and that Herod was in that region, Pilate decided to send Him to Herod to see what he would say. Herod was quite pleased to see Jesus because he had heard a lot about Him and had wanted to see Him for some time. Notice in verse 8 that Herod heard that Jesus was a miracle worker. His particular interest in Jesus was to see Him do some kind of miracle.

There are many people like Herod in our day. They have heard of the wonders the Lord performs. They come to Him like Herod with the intention of seeing Him do a miracle for them. Their interest is like the interest of the people in the crowds who came to Jesus every day. They came for what they could get out of Him. They came to be touched and to have Him minister to them. They came to be entertained and to see Jesus' wonderful works but they

did not come for Him. Herod's interest in Jesus had nothing to do with His spiritual condition. Herod had no concern for His soul. He just wanted to see Jesus do a wonderful miracle in His presence.

Notice in verse 9 that while Herod asked Jesus many questions, Jesus did not answer him. We are left to wonder why Jesus did not answer. Could it be that Jesus knew the intention of Herod's heart?

As Jesus stood quietly before Herod, the chief priests and the teachers of the law continued to accuse Him. They were desperate to get Herod to put Him to death. Herod listened to their accusations and, possibly because he was disappointed that he had not seen His miracle, he began to mock and ridicule Jesus. His soldiers did the same. Luke tells us that they dressed Jesus in an elegant robe to ridicule Him for saying that He was king, and sent Him back to Pilate. Herod found nothing in Jesus to sentence Him to death. This incident, however, seemed to cement a relationship between Pilate and Herod. Prior to this incident they had been enemies (Luke 23:12).

To this point, the Jews have not been able to find a legal reason to kill Jesus. He had been examined by Pilate and Herod and neither had been able to find a reason to accuse Him of a crime worthy of death. The Jews would not give up. They would not be happy until Jesus had been killed.

What is striking in this passage is that Jesus does not defend Himself. He remains quiet throughout the entire trial with Herod. He was committed to doing the will of the Father. This was not the time to defend Himself nor was it the time to perform miracles. His heart was set on the will of the Father and He waited quietly for that will to unfold.

What is also striking here is the hardness of the hearts of the Jewish leaders. These religious people were set in their ways. Unlike Jesus, whose total confidence was in the will of the Father, these religious leaders were doing all they could in their own human strength and wisdom to have Jesus killed. The religious leaders would succeed in having Jesus killed but, in the end, they would lose their battle. Jesus would be raised from the dead and they would be judged.

There is one more thing that we need to see from this passage. The religious leaders of the day were more blind to the innocence of Jesus than were the "unbelievers." Both Herod and Pilate could find nothing wrong with Jesus. The religious leaders of the day could not find anything good in Him. The religion of the Jewish leaders was more blinding than the worldliness of the Roman leaders. The hardest people to reach are those who think they have all the answers.

#### For Consideration:

- Why was Herod delighted to see Jesus? Are there people in our day who want to see Him for the same reasons?
- Take a moment to compare the response of the religious leaders and the response of the political leaders to Jesus? What is the difference? Who was closer to the truth? What does this tell us?
- What is the difference between "religion" and true faith in God? How is this demonstrated to us in the

example of Christ and the religious leaders of that day?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider who the Lord is and what He has done for you. Take the time to praise Him for who He is.
- Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have only been concerned about yourself and not about seeking Him with all your heart.
- Ask the Lord to show you the difference between true faith in Him and religious activity.
- Ask the Lord to help you to learn to be quiet and confident in Him in your trials and difficulties.

## 35

# JESUS BEFORE PILATE AGAIN

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Read Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25

Jesus had been tried by the Jewish leaders and found guilty of blasphemy. In order to pass the death sentence, they brought Him to Pilate. Pilate examined the evidence but found no reason to condemn Him. Jesus was sent to Herod who was in Jerusalem at the time. Even Herod found no reason to condemn Him to death. Herod and His soldiers mocked Jesus and sent Him back to Pilate. This now is the second time Jesus appeared before Pilate.

Pilate did not know what to do with Jesus. He had not been able to find any reason to kill Him but the people refused to let Jesus go. They insisted on His death.

There was a custom at that time during the Jewish Feast of Passover for the governor to pardon and release a prisoner. The prisoner was chosen by the crowd. Pilate was seeking a means of releasing Jesus quietly. He chose a notorious prisoner named Barabbas to stand with Jesus.

Pilate offered the crowd the option of choosing one of these prisoners to be pardoned and released. Mark 15:7 tells us that Barabbas was guilty of insurrection in the city. He had caused an uprising and was also guilty of murder. It is not without reason that Pilate placed these two individuals side by side. Barabbas was obviously guilty. He was worthy of the death penalty. He was also guilty of the very things the Jews were accusing Jesus of without proof. Pilate asked the crowd which person they wanted him to deliver over to them. Matthew 27:18 tells us that Pilate knew that the only reason the Jews wanted to kill Jesus was because of jealousy and envy.

As Pilate sat on His judgment seat awaiting the response of the people, His wife sent him a message. She told him that she had a dream about Jesus. In that dream, she came to realize that Jesus was an innocent man. While we are not told anything about the dream, Pilate's wife told him that she had suffered much all day long because of it. She was afraid of what would happen if they killed Jesus.

The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for the release of Barabbas. These leaders were able to manipulate and control the people under them. The results were devastating. They would one day have to answer to God for their actions.

Pilate asked the crowd what He was to do with Jesus. They called for His crucifixion. When Pilate asked them what wrong He had done to deserve this they simply cried out for His crucifixion. The cries grew louder and louder. There was no reasoning with this crowd.

Luke tells us that Pilate called the chief priests and rulers of the people together to speak personally with them. He told them that he had found nothing in Jesus that deserved

the death penalty. He had tried Him and found Him innocent. He had sent Him to Herod who had also found Him innocent. He told them that he would beat Jesus and set Him free. Pilate did not want to kill Jesus.

This did not go over well with the chief priests and the rulers. They called for His crucifixion. Though Pilate saw that there was no changing the minds of these leaders he made still another attempt to set Jesus free (Luke 23:20). Luke tells us in Luke 23:22 that Pilate tried yet a third time to reason with the crowd by telling them clearly that Jesus had done absolutely nothing to deserve death. Again the crowd kept calling for His crucifixion.

When Pilate saw that the mind of the crowd was made up, he called for a bowl to be brought to him. Standing before the crowd, he washed His hands telling them that he was innocent of Jesus' blood and the guilt would fall on them. "Let His blood be on us and on our children," they said (Matthew 27:25). With those words, Pilate handed Jesus over to the crowd.

One of the clear lessons we learn here is that Satan is a master of manipulation and deceit. He used the religious leaders to manipulate and deceive the people so that they called for the crucifixion of Jesus. He used the crowd to manipulate and control Pilate so that he handed Jesus over to be crucified. Satan is a manipulator. He will do whatever it takes to get His own way. Notice that he does not hesitate to use religious leaders to do His work.

Satan continues to do this in our day as well. You can see evidence of this even in churches. There are church leaders who have become guilty of manipulating people. They are not allowing the Spirit of God free reign in their ministries. Instead they seek to do whatever it takes to get

people to make the decisions they believe they need to make. I have found myself guilty of this at times. I have tried to convince others of my opinion instead of letting the Spirit of God do that work. How often have we tried to take on the role of the Holy Spirit? All manipulation and control needs to be avoided. We need to let God convince. We need to share the Word of God and preach with all our heart but the role of changing lives and convicting of sin belongs to the Holy Spirit.

Notice also how Pilate allows himself to be controlled by the crowd. He knew Jesus was innocent but still let the crowd tell him what to do. He was concerned about what others thought. He was concerned about His reputation and His job. He did take a firm stand on what he knew to be true. He allowed an innocent man to be convicted and killed out of convenience. May God give us enough strength of conviction that we would stand firm no matter what others say or what personal cost we will have to pay.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the power of manipulation and control?
- Have you ever been guilty of trying to convince or control others? What is the role of the Holy Spirit?
- Why is it so hard to trust the Holy Spirit to work? Why do we feel we need to take on His role?
- What is the difference between the way Satan manipulates and controls and the way the Spirit of God leads?

- Pilate lacked the strength of conviction to do what was right. Do you have enough strength of conviction that you could stand firm despite what others say or what it would cost you personally?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have been guilty of controlling and manipulating others instead of letting His Holy Spirit work.
- Thank the Lord for the work of the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to give you the grace to trust in Him.
- Ask the Lord to give you more strength of conviction so that you can stand firm no matter the cost.



## 36

### JESUS IS CONDEMNED

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Read Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-19

Jesus had been tried by Pilate for the second time. Pilate made it quite clear to the crowd that he found no reason to condemn Him to death. He allowed himself to be manipulated by the crowd and the religious leaders, however, and released Jesus over to them.

Pilate did what he knew was wrong because of the pressure placed on him. Satan knew that if he continued to apply pressure, Pilate would eventually fold under it. How important it is for us to understand this in our own spiritual walk. If you continue to allow the enemy to pressure you in a given area of your life you too may find yourself breaking under the pressure. How important it is to flee from the temptations of the enemy. To remain where we are being tempted is to invite a problem.

When Pilate handed Jesus over to the Jews, the soldiers took Him into the Praetorium. This was likely the great hall where gatherings took place. Mark tells us that it was in

the palace. Here Jesus was surrounded by a whole company of soldiers.

There in the great hall of the palace, the soldiers stripped Jesus and put a scarlet robe on Him. They twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on His head. They put a staff in His right hand representing a king's sceptre. They bowed down to Him and mocked Him saying, "Hail king of the Jews" (Matthew 27:29). They spat on Him and took His staff and struck Him on the head "again and again" (Matthew 27:30). It should be remembered that Jesus had a crown of thorns on His head. With every blow of the staff, the thorns would be pushed deeper into His scalp. When the soldiers had finished mocking Him, they put His own clothes back on Him and led Him off to be crucified.

It is not hard to see that Satan is behind this terrible mockery and abuse. He delighted in inspiring the crowds and the soldiers to mock and abuse our Lord. He used Jesus for His own pleasure and then discarded Him. If you have ever seen a cat play with a mouse you will understand something of the nature of Satan. The cat will not kill the mouse right away. Instead it will play with it until it gets bored and then kill it. Very often the only interest the cat has in the mouse is to play with it until it dies. Often a cat will simply walk away from a mouse when it is dead. Satan is like this. He will play with you until he gets bored and then leave you dead and deserted.

Jesus patiently endured His suffering. He did not resist what they were doing to Him. The Father allowed these terrible things to happen. Sometimes we feel that we should never have to suffer. Jesus had to suffer. The Father could have stopped His suffering but He chose not to do so. We do not always understand the reason God allows suffering to take place. What is clear, however, is that

this suffering would not be in vain. Through it the Lord God would accomplish His great and wonderful purpose for the salvation of His people.

The enemy was inflicting heavy blows but the battle belonged to the Lord. The enemy could not possibly win. He may be striking you today. If you belong to the Lord Jesus, the enemy cannot win the battle. Be assured of another thing as well. If God has allowed these blows of the enemy it is because they will accomplish a greater good in you.

The suffering of the Lord Jesus on that day was terrible. God allowed the enemy to do this horrible deed. All this was for us. Jesus did not resist what happened. He did not fight back nor did He defend Himself. He accepted the will and purpose of the Father because He knew it would accomplish the salvation of those the Father had given to Him. Would you be willing to face what Jesus faced without complaint? God calls all who belong to Christ to take up their cross. May He give us grace to do this.

For Consideration:

- Has the enemy been striking you? What has he been doing? What comfort do you take from this passage?
- Have you seen God use the blows of the enemy in your life to accomplish greater good? Explain.
- Why is it so tempting to defend ourselves and fight back?

- Are you willing today to take up your cross to follow the Lord Jesus today?
- Why do you suppose God does not keep us from suffering?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He willingly endured the mockery, insults and pain for us.
- Thank the Lord that the battle belongs to Him and that He cannot lose that battle. Thank Him that Satan will be defeated and the kingdom of God expanded.
- Ask the Lord to give you the grace to endure the trials that come your way even as He endured them for us.

## 37

# JESUS WALKS TO GOLGOTHA

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Read Matthew 27:32-34; Mark 15:20-23; Luke 23:26-32

Jesus had been handed over to be crucified. The religious leaders manipulated the crowd and the crowd manipulated Pilate. As they led Jesus to the place where He would be crucified, the Roman soldiers forced a man by the name of Simon to carry Jesus' cross. Simon was from Cyrene (in the region of North Africa). Mark tells us that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. This obviously was a detail that meant something to the people of the day. The apostle Paul sends His greetings to a man by the name of Rufus in Romans 16:13 saying:

Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and His mother,  
who has been a mother to me, too.

It is unclear why Simon the Cyrene was in Jerusalem. Could it be, however, that this incident drew the attention of this family to Jesus? Could it be that this very act was in part responsible for the salvation of Simon's wife and

Rufus? While this is pure speculation we do know that carrying the cross of Jesus would not have been easily forgotten by Simon and was part of God's perfect plan. What an amazing thing that God would use this North African to carry the cross. In calling Simon to carry the cross, God demonstrated that the work of Jesus was for the whole world. We are told that Simon was seized and forced to carry the cross of Jesus. While according to worldly standards this man was chosen by chance, from God's perspective there is no such thing as chance. This man was chosen by God.

We are not told what Simon was doing in Jerusalem that day but one thing is sure. He had to put aside His agenda when he picked up that cross. This is what the Lord is calling us to do as well. All who pick up their cross to follow the Lord Jesus must put aside their own ideas and plans.

It required effort for Simon to pick up the cross. The cross was heavy and awkward to carry. The road was not easy. God did not promise that things would be easy when we pick up our cross either. The road will at times be difficult and the cross sometimes heavy. God makes no apology for this. Be assured, however, that the way of the cross is always the way of victory.

Notice that Simon was called to follow behind Jesus. He was not to go before Him but to follow His footsteps all the way to Golgotha. We are to do the same. We are to look to Him as our example and model. To follow in His steps is to be obedient to Him in everything. Every step Jesus took, Simon was to follow closely behind. He was not to take His eyes off of Jesus. In picking up our cross, we too will have to make it our goal to follow the leadership and direction of the Lord no matter where that takes us.

As they travelled to Golgotha, Luke tells us that there were a large number of women on the side of the road mourning for Jesus. Jesus told them not to mourn for Him but to mourn for themselves. He told them that the day was coming when they would consider the barren woman blessed and call on the mountains and the hills to fall on them. Jesus looks ahead in time to what was going to unfold after His death. The day was coming when He would return to judge. Jesus was not concerned about what He was going to suffer. What He was concerned about was what would happen to those who rejected what He was about to accomplish by His death on that cruel cross.

In Luke 23:31 Jesus made an interesting comment:

For if men do these things when the tree is green,  
what will happen when it is dry?

In other words, if in the days when Jesus walked on the earth people turned their backs on Him, what would happen hundreds of years later when evil began to take deeper root in the earth? Jesus often taught His disciples that as the end drew, near evil would increase on the earth. If in Jesus' day this is what human beings were capable of doing, what will they do when evil increased on the earth?

Jesus was led to the cross with two other men to be crucified (Luke 23:32). When they arrived at the place of crucifixion, Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh to help to deaden the pain He would experience. He refused to take this mixture. Instead, He chose to bear the full load of pain for you and me. He would not take the easy way. He would experience every ounce of pain and suffering required of Him by His Father for our sin.

## For Consideration:

- What do we learn from Simon about what it means to follow the Lord Jesus?
- Have you taken up your cross? What does it mean for you to follow the Lord Jesus today? What does it mean for you to be the believer God wants you to be?
- What does God's choice of Simon in this passage teach us about God's heart for the entire world?
- Will you be ready when the Lord returns again to judge the earth?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to enable you to take up your cross to follow Him. Ask Him to show you clearly what that means for you.
- Thank the Lord that He agreed to pay the full price for your sin.
- Thank the Lord that He will return to bring justice on this earth.
- Thank the Lord for His tremendous patience with us and this world despite our rejection of Him and His salvation.

## 38

### ON THE CROSS:

#### PART 1

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Read Matthew 27:35-44; Mark 15:24-32; Luke 23:33-43

The terrible deed was done. Jesus was nailed to the cross and now hung there for the world to see. In a short while He would be dead. As He hung there to die, there was no bitterness towards His murderers. Luke tells us that Jesus cried out to His Father for their forgiveness. He appealed to the Father on the basis that these individuals did not know what they were doing. This did not make them innocent. They still needed to be forgiven of this terrible sin. Paul speaks about this in 1 Timothy 1:13:

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

Ignorance and unbelief in the things of God are not excuses. They are, however, sins that can be forgiven. Paul, the greatest persecutor of the church of His day, was forgiven because he did not realize what he was doing.

Those who crucified Jesus did not understand what they were doing either. Even after crucifying Him they could still repent and receive the salvation He came to offer. There are those, however, who sin in open rebellion. They know the truth but refuse it. Those who refuse to accept the truth they understand and know, throw away the only hope they have.

As Jesus hung on the cross, the soldiers divided His clothes among them by casting lots. We can only imagine the frustration this would have caused those who loved the Lord. There at the foot of the cross the soldiers played a game with Jesus' clothes. The soldier who won that little game may have leapt up for joy at winning Jesus' garment. There was no respect for the dying man. Even as He was dying they fought over who was going to get which piece of clothing. Imagine what His disciples and family thought as they watched this game unfold at the foot of the cross.

Luke tells us that the soldiers added to the misery and disrespect of that scene by sneering at Jesus. They offered Him sour wine to drink. They told Him that if He was the king of the Jews He should come down from the cross. They mocked Him saying that He had saved others but He could not save himself. Remember that all this was being said to a dying man. The disrespect is enormous. Jesus quietly endured this mockery, knowing that He could at any moment call on the angels of heaven to come to His aid. Jesus was committed to going all the way in this matter. Nothing would keep Him from completing His task.

The Romans put a sign above Jesus' head. The sign read: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews (Matthew 27:37). This was an attempt to mock and insult. They did not believe this. The authorities wanted to show the people what would happen to anyone who sought to claim such status

in a Roman dominated nation. They were telling those who trusted in Jesus that their hopes had vanished. Their king was dead.

The crowd that passed by the cross too hurled insults at Jesus as He was dying in such pain. It would have been bad enough to die in this humiliating and cruel way but to have the crowds and the soldiers hurling insults at Him made this even worse. As the crowd walked by the cross, they shook their fists at Him in contempt. They reminded Him that He had said that He would destroy the temple and build it in three days. They had yet to see the fulfilment of that prophecy. In just three days Jesus would rise from the dead. The prophecy would be fulfilled as He said.

It was not only the soldiers and the people who mocked Jesus. Matthew tells us that the chief priests and the teachers of the law also mocked Him (Matthew 27:42-43):

“He saved others,” they said, “but He can't save Himself! He's the King of Israel! Let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now if He wants Him, for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

The insults did not stop with the soldiers, crowd and leaders. Right there beside Him on the cross were two criminals. One of those criminals also began to hurl insults at Jesus. "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" he said (Luke 23:39).

In this whole scene there is only one individual who took up Jesus' defence. It was the other criminal who spoke out as he hung there dying on the cross beside Jesus. "Don't you fear God," he said (Luke 23:40). Rebuking the other criminal for such disrespect, he reminded him that both of

them deserved to die but Jesus had done nothing wrong. He recognized Jesus as innocent. Turning to Jesus, he asked Him to remember him when He came to paradise. In saying this, the criminal was recognizing that Jesus was who He said He was. He was confessing Him as Lord. As he hung on the cross he turned to Jesus for His salvation. He did not care what others thought. He knew that the crowd all mocked and insulted Jesus but he believed. That day he cried out to Jesus for a place in heaven. He trusted Jesus as His only hope. Jesus told him that that very day he would be with Him in paradise. They would journey together to heaven. His faith would be rewarded. In His great hour of need, this one criminal must have been Jesus' greatest encouragement and blessing. God's comfort comes sometimes in very strange ways.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the mockery that took place at the cross? How would this have added to the suffering of Jesus?
- What do you think the Lord Jesus felt as He watched the people mock Him?
- What encouragement do you think Jesus received from the criminal on the cross beside Him? What does this tell you about the kind of people God can use?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the way He was willing to suffer these insults for you?
- Ask the Lord to give you the courage to face the insults and mocking that comes your way for following Jesus.
- Thank the Lord that He could use even a criminal on the cross to be a blessing to the Lord Jesus. Thank Him that He can use you as well.



## 39

# ON THE CROSS: PART 2

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Read Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46

Mark 15:25 tells us that it was at the third hour of the day (9 a.m.) that they crucified the Lord Jesus. He had been on the cross for three hours now. We are told that from the sixth hour (noon) to the ninth hour (3 p.m.) there was darkness on the earth. The sixth hour of the day was noon. At the time when the sun should have been brightest in the sky, darkness came over the entire land. God was speaking through this. The earth seemed to groan at what was happening. Also during that time Luke tells us that the curtain in the temple was torn in two. This was the curtain that separated the people from the Holy of Holies where God's presence was manifested. Only the high priest could enter through the curtain into the presence of God once a year. As Jesus gave His life, the division between God and human beings was broken. God ripped that curtain. The price for sin had been paid. Sin was no longer an obstacle. Because of Jesus' death, people could enter directly into the presence of God.

The darkness that engulfed the land seems to represent the horrible deed that had taken place. This was a dark moment in the history of the world. Human beings had lashed out against their Creator. They turned their heart against their Saviour. The ripped curtain in the temple, however, represented the good that came from that darkness. God was able to take what was the most terrible day in the world and make it a day of blessing. Through the terrible sin of His creation, God would bring about the salvation of the world. He can take your failures and sins and accomplish His purposes through them as well.

It was the ninth hour of the day (about three o'clock) that the Lord Jesus cried out in a loud voice: "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" (Matthew 27:46). Matthew tells us that this phrase means "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus knew the abandonment of the Father. At that moment in time, the Father turned His face from His Son. The separation from God was terrible. Jesus had always lived His life in constant communion with His Father. Now there was silence. The peace and the presence of God were no longer there. There was only darkness.

It is important that we understand how Jesus dealt with this sense of abandonment. Though He no longer heard the Father and all sense of the Father's presence was gone, He committed His soul into His hands and gave up His spirit. This is how Jesus died. He died at the moment His Father turned His face from Him. What a horrible way to die. The physical pain and agony was one thing but this was something quite different.

I believe there are churches where the presence of God has been withdrawn. I believe there are times in our own lives when the presence of God has been withdrawn for one reason or another. Sometimes it is sin that causes the

presence of God to withdraw. Sometimes He does so to teach us an important lesson. In those times we no longer seem to hear from God. He seems far away and our prayers don't seem to be answered. We feel powerless in ministry and our prayer and worship seems to be empty and dry. The sad thing is that all too many believers are quite content to remain in this condition. All too many churches continue to function with no real sense of God's presence or power in their midst. Sometimes they don't even seem to realize that God has withdrawn His presence.

It is important that we understand here that we are not speaking about salvation. Our salvation is secure. God may, however, withdraw His fellowship from His children for a time. While our salvation is secure our fellowship with Jesus and our empowerment for ministry is hindered. Jesus grieved at the withdrawing of the presence of His Father. His fellowship with God was so much a part of His life and being that it grieved Him deeply to have the Father pull back even for a moment. Would we feel that same grief?

Those present at the cross, hearing that Jesus was crying out to His father, thought He was calling out for Elijah. They may have thought that He was becoming delusional? One of those present had compassion on Him and dipped a sponge into wine vinegar offering it to Him to drink. Others continued to mock. They told those caring for Jesus to leave Him alone to see if Elijah came to save him. Elijah never came. Jesus laid down His life and died.

## For Consideration:

- We have here in this section a picture of the darkness that filled the earth and the curtain that was ripped in two. What do these two pictures teach us about how God can use even the most terrible circumstance to accomplish great good?
- Have you ever felt abandoned by the Lord? Have you ever had to go through a period of silence? What do we learn here about how Jesus dealt with these circumstances?
- Is there evidence of the presence of God in your life and church? Explain.
- Can our sin cause the empowering and peaceful presence of God to withdraw? Can you be a believer and still have God withdraw His fellowship and empowering presence from you?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a deeper desire to experience His presence in your life and community?
- Thank the Lord that He faced the abandonment of His Father for us.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have driven His presence from you by your persistence in sin and rebellion.
- Thank the Lord that while we may not be always able to experience His presence we can remain confident in the truth of His faithfulness to us.

## **E V E N T S   A F T E R**

## **C H R I S T ' S   D E A T H**

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Read Matthew 27:51-56; Mark 15:38-41; Luke 23:47-49

The Lord Jesus had been crucified. At that precise moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51). This curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple. No one but the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies. It was here that the special presence of the Lord was revealed. There was a separation between God and man. That separation was the result of sin.

The priests regularly sacrificed bulls, goats, and lambs to appease the anger of God but the separation remained. The blood of these animals could never pay the price for sin. Hebrews 10:3-4 tells us:

But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

At best these sacrifices were only a temporary measure. The penalty of sin remained unpaid. Animal blood could not change the human heart. Though hundreds of thousands of animals were sacrificed, human beings were still separated from God.

When the Lord Jesus laid down His life as a sacrifice for sin, the demands of God were completely satisfied. All other sacrifices were imperfect. Jesus alone lived a perfect life. His sacrifice was not tarnished by sin. The legal requirements of God were completely satisfied in the perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. God demonstrated this by ripping the curtain that symbolized the separation between God and His creation.

There is significance in the way the curtain was ripped. The fact that it was ripped from the top indicates that it was God who took the initiative. In ripping the curtain, God was declaring that the separation was now over. All who accept the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus can now enter His presence without fear. God is pleased to receive all who will come through the sacrifice of His Son. His sacrifice has covered their sin and removed the barrier between God and His people. The ripping of the curtain was a powerful symbol of what took place that day when Jesus died for our sin.

There were other signs that took place that day. Matthew tells us that the whole earth shook when Jesus died. There could be no doubting the fact that something significant had happened. The earth itself felt the impact of the death of its Creator.

When the earth shook, tombs were opened and the bodies of many holy men and women were raised to life. These individuals came out of the tombs and appeared to many people in the city of Jerusalem. This matter is quite

perplexing but significant. Who were these individuals raised from the dead? The passage tells us that they were holy men and women. These were Old Testament saints who had died. These were men and women who were looking forward to the Messiah and His coming.

Why do they rise from the dead? While the passage does not clearly tell us, it is quite clear that their resurrection proved something to the world. First, it proved that the death of Jesus was no ordinary death. His death released the dead from their graves. It gave evidence to the entire world that Jesus was innocent and that His death would accomplish something significant. Second, the resurrection of these saints showed the world that death itself was broken. Through the work of the Lord Jesus, death had been conquered. This great enemy no longer had any hold on those who trusted in the Lord Jesus. By allowing these men and women to rise from the dead and walk through the streets of Jerusalem, the Lord was showing that Jesus' death would bring life.

When the centurion and those who were guarding Jesus at the cross saw what was happening they were terrified. The events that surrounded His crucifixion were very powerful signs that Jesus was everything He said He was. "Surely He was the Son of God," they proclaimed (Matthew 27:54).

We can understand why these guards would have been terrified. They had mocked and insulted Jesus. They had been responsible for putting Him to death. The signs proved to them that He was the Son of God. They knew that they stood under the wrath of God for what they had done.

The followers of Jesus stood a little ways off from the cross. They had followed Him too and tried to minister to Him at this time. They grieved over what had just happened. They did not really understand all these events. They were perplexed and confused but these events must have encouraged them. They didn't see it right now or understand the full impact of what had happened but there could be no doubt that something significant had taken place that day. The earth and heavens felt the impact. The curtain was ripped in a very mysterious way from top to bottom. The dead were raised to life. Those who did not believe Jesus in His life were forced now to consider Him in His death.

For Consideration:

- What did the death of Jesus accomplish that the death of all the bulls, goats and lambs of the Old Testament could not accomplish?
- What encouragement do you take from the fact that the saints of the Old Testament rose from the dead when Jesus died? What hope does this give us?
- What warning do you receive from the soldiers at the foot of the cross who finally realized that they had killed the Messiah? Will those who see the Lord at His second coming have a second chance to repent like these soldiers?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the signs that took place at His death showing the Father's approval of His work on the cross.
- Ask the Lord to give you faith to believe that though you may not understand what is happening around you, God is still working.
- Take a moment to pray that the Lord would open the eyes of those who, like the soldiers at the cross, do not understand that they are rejecting their only hope of salvation.



## THE BURIAL OF JESUS

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Read Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56

In the last meditation, we saw how, at the crucifixion of Christ, darkness covered the land and the earth shook. The curtain of the temple was ripped from top to bottom and Old Testament saints rose from their graves appearing in the city of Jerusalem. These were all very powerful signs that the death of Jesus was a turning point in the history of the world.

It was now the day before the Sabbath and the Jews needed to take Jesus' body down from the cross. As evening approached, a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea approached Pilate to ask for Jesus' body. There are several things we need to understand about Joseph of Arimathea.

Notice that Matthew 27:57 tells us that he was a disciple of Jesus. Joseph was from the Jewish city of Arimathea. He was a very influential man in the community. Mark 15:43 tells us that he was a Council member. This was likely the Council that had called for Jesus crucifixion. Luke

23:50 tells us that Joseph, however, had not consented to the death of Jesus but he could do nothing to stop it. As a disciple of Jesus, Mark tells us that Joseph was waiting for the kingdom of God (Mark 15:43). Luke adds that he lived a godly and upright life (Luke 23:50).

Joseph used His influence to ask Pilate for the body of Jesus. Mark tells us that he went "boldly" to ask for the body (Mark 15:43). This leads us to understand that there was a certain risk in this for Joseph. From the response of Pilate, we understand that the risk was not from the Roman authorities. The risk would have been from the Jewish Council members. They had arrested and convicted Jesus. They had little tolerance for those who supported Jesus. Joseph was risking His own life by caring for the body of Jesus. He was quite willing to do this, however, out of respect for the Lord and what He represented.

Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead. Before handing the body of Jesus over to Joseph, Pilate confirmed His death first with the centurion. Only then did Pilate hand the body over to Joseph. This is a significant fact. The actual death of Christ was confirmed by Pilate and the centurion. No one could say that He was taken off the cross alive. Joseph took Jesus' body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and placed it in a new tomb. He then rolled a stone over that tomb to seal it.

The women who had been at the cross followed behind Joseph to see where he would lay the body. This shows us that the procedure was done in some secrecy. When the women discovered where the tomb was they went home to prepare spices for Jesus' body. Because it was Sabbath they rested with the intention of returning the next day to the tomb with the spices.

Notice the clear evidence that the Lord was dead and buried. There could be no doubt about the death of Jesus. It was confirmed by a Roman official. Pilate specifically asked the centurion to confirm that the Lord Jesus had died. The centurion assured him that He had. Joseph also was assured that the Lord was dead. He would never have put Him in the tomb and sealed it if He wasn't. If there was any indication to Joseph that Jesus was alive he would have cared for Him. Joseph knew He was dead and so placed Him in the tomb and left.

The Gospel writers want to make it clear to us that Jesus did die. There have been many who have contradicted this and tried to explain the resurrection by saying that Jesus did not really die on the cross. The evidence here is quite clear. Jesus gave His life on the cross. He did this for you and me. He would also conquer death for us. In His death and resurrection we can have hope.

#### For Consideration:

- What evidence is there in this passage that Jesus did die?
- Why is it important for us to know that Jesus died?
- What risk was Joseph of Arimathea taking when he asked for the body of Jesus?
- What hope does the fact that Jesus died and rose from the dead give you?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He rose from the dead. Thank Him for the hope that His death brings to you personally.
- Ask the Lord to give you courage like Joseph to stand up for the Lord despite what others might say.
- Thank the Lord that death is conquered. Thank Him that, because of His work, you too have hope.

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# THE WATCH AT THE SEPULCHRE

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Read Matthew 27:62-66

As we saw in the last meditation, it was important for the Gospel writers to explain to their readers that the Lord Jesus had indeed died. This was important because there were many individuals who wanted to disprove the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is significant because, if the perfect Son of God did not rise from the dead, what hope could we ever have over death and the grave? If Jesus did not rise from the dead, what assurance would we have that His sacrifice was accepted by the Father?

There were other attempts to explain away what happened to Jesus' body. Some said that the body of Jesus was stolen from the tomb in an attempt to make people believe that He had risen from the dead. Here in this next section, we see that there was no chance whatsoever that the body of Jesus could have been stolen from the tomb.

It was the chief priests and the Pharisees who were concerned that something might happen to the body of Christ. They remembered that Jesus had said that, after three days, He would rise from the dead. They did not believe it was possible for Jesus to rise from the dead but they were quite concerned that the disciples might steal His body and say that He had. To avoid any such deception, the Jewish leaders approached Pilate asking for permission to have a guard placed at the tomb.

Notice in Matthew 27:63 that the chief priests and the Pharisees persisted in their disbelief. They called Jesus a deceiver. It is quite hard to understand how they could remain so hard despite the evidence they saw in those days. The centurion who stood at the cross was broken by what he saw. He declared that Jesus had to be the Son of God. While this pagan Roman soldier saw that Jesus was the Son of God, the religious leaders could not see it.

Pilate gave permission to the Jews to place a guard at the tomb. He even instructed them to make the tomb as secure as possible until the third day.

The chief priests and the Pharisees put a seal on the stone. We are not clearly told what kind of seal was placed there but at the very least it would have been a sign making it a punishable offense to touch that stone or enter the tomb. They also posted a guard. Only when they were confident that no one could possibly take the body of Jesus did they leave.

As we examine this story we see all the efforts that were made to keep the body of Jesus from leaving that tomb. Humanly there was no possible way for the body to be removed. While they did all they could, they did not realize that they were dealing with the all-powerful God. All these

efforts would be to no avail. These chief priests could not possibly hold back the purpose of God. Like a feather in a windstorm or a twig in a tidal wave, their efforts would be swept away by the all-powerful hand of God. They could not resist His purposes. Their human strength was no match for the God of heaven.

We can take great comfort here in this passage. God laughs at the attempts of man to thwart His plans. The Gospel has had powerful foes throughout its history. Governments and religious leaders have risen up to thwart the purpose of God. They have done everything in their power to destroy the plans of God but they have all failed. Like the chief priests and Pharisees, many have sought to destroy the church and hinder its advance. Every effort has failed. What comfort we need to take in this. God will accomplish His purposes. Nothing will hinder Him or His plan. Salvation is sure. Victory is assured.

#### For Consideration:

- How do we know that the body of Jesus could not have been stolen? What precautions had been taken to assure this did not happen?
- Why was it so important that the Jews be sure that no one could take the body of Jesus? How did this prove the resurrection?
- What comfort do you take from the fact that the Jewish leaders could not possibly hinder the purpose and plan of God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He softened your heart by His Holy Spirit to see and understand His purpose.
- Thank the Lord that nothing can stand against His sovereign purposes.
- Take a moment to pray for someone who has been living in unbelief like the Pharisees and the chief priests. Ask God to soften their heart.

## THE VISIT TO THE TOMB

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Read Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12

It was on the first day of the week, very early in the morning that Mary Magdalene and her friend Mary the mother of James and her friend Salome went to the tomb. Their plan was to anoint the body of Jesus. His body had not been prepared for burial because He had been crucified just prior to the Sabbath.

As they approached the tomb they wondered how they were going to get the stone rolled away to prepare the body. By the time they arrived at the tomb, however, that question was resolved. They found the stone had already been rolled away and the entrance was open. This obviously took them by surprise.

Matthew explains what happened. As the guards stood watch over the tomb there was a mighty earthquake. An angel descended from heaven and went directly to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

This angel was quite a sight to see. Matthew tells us that He was bright as lightning and His clothes were as white as snow. When the guards saw this, they were terrified and "shook and became as dead men" (Matthew 28:4). They likely fainted or were unable to move with fear.

When the women arrived at the tomb, they went inside and saw the angel dressed in white (Mark 16:5). They, too, were afraid but the angel spoke to them and calmed their fear. He told them that the Lord Jesus was no longer in the tomb. He had risen from the dead.

Luke gives us a more detailed account of what happened. He tells us that these events were confusing to the women. In their confusion, two angels appeared to them. They were dressed in white and shone like lightning. The women were afraid and fell down with their faces to the ground. These angels had been sent to them to explain the events that had taken place. "Why do you look for the living among the dead," they asked in Luke 24:5. The angels then reminded the women of the words that Jesus had spoken to them. Jesus had told them that He would be delivered to sinful men and on the third day He would rise from the dead. The Gospel writer tells us in Luke 24:8 that these women remembered these words when the angels brought them to their attention. The women had heard what Jesus said when He was alive but it was not until He rose from the dead that they really understood His words.

The angels commanded the women to tell His disciples that Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee. Filled with a strange mixture of joy and fear, they ran to tell His disciples what had happened.

It is interesting that the women never did anoint the body of Jesus with their prepared spices. In Mark 14 we read

the story of the woman who came into the home of Simon the Leper with a jar of pure nard. She broke the jar and anointed the Lord Jesus with its contents. While the disciples saw this as a waste of money, the Lord told them in Mark 14:8 that she did this for His burial.

She did what she could. She poured perfume on  
my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.

The women who went to the tomb that day did not need to anoint Jesus. This matter had already been taken care of by this woman who came to Simon's house.

When the women returned to the disciples and told them all that had happened, the disciples did not believe them. What the women said seemed to be nonsense to them. Peter, however, ran to the tomb to see for himself. Maybe he was the most desperate to see Jesus. We need to remember that he had denied Him three times.

When Peter arrived at the tomb, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves. Jesus was no longer wrapped in these strips. Luke 24:12 tells us that Peter wondered what had happened. Luke does not tell us that Peter believed, he simply wondered. He needed proof.

The power of God had been demonstrated but His people were having a hard time understanding and accepting what had happened. What they had seen defied all human logic. The passage shows us that God moves in ways we will never be able to understand. Here in this passage we find a group of very confused disciples. They were not sure what to believe. They don't have a logical explanation to what had happened. What is most encouraging is that the Lord would take these confused disciples and use them in very powerful ways in the years to come. What was

confusing to them at that point would become the central truth on which their ministry would be built.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself trying to logically explain away a miraculous work of God? Why do we doubt?
- How does this section challenge and encourage us to believe in a God of the impossible? How should this understanding influence how we live before Him?
- Why is the resurrection important? What hope would we have if Jesus had not risen from the grave?
- The picture we have in this passage is of a group of very confused disciples. These, however, were the men and women God was going to use. What comfort do you find in the fact that God is able to use us just as we are?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He rose from the dead. Thank Him for the hope this brings you personally.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have doubted His power and works.

- Ask God to give you faith to trust that nothing is impossible with Him and that His ways are perfect even though we don't always understand them.
- Thank the Lord that He is able to use us just as we are.



## **JESUS APPEARS TO MARY MAGDALENE AND THE OTHER WOMEN**

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Read Matthew 28:9-10; Mark 16:9-11

When the women who had come to the tomb to prepare the body of Jesus arrived they were greeted by angels. These angels had told them that Jesus had risen from the dead and was going to Galilee. They instructed them to go and tell His disciples what they had seen and heard. As the women ran to speak to the disciples they were filled with fear and joy.

Matthew 28:8-10 tells us that as these women hurried to tell the disciples what had happened, the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to them. Notice in Matthew 28:10 that Jesus recognized their fear and comforted them in it. Seeing Jesus, the women clasped His feet and worshipped (Matthew 28:9). They worshipped Him because they understood that He was truly Lord. His resurrection from the dead was proof that He was the Son of God, deserving

of their worship and praise. Jesus received their worship and commanded them to tell the disciples that they were to meet Him in Galilee.

It is significant to note the difference between the response of the women and the response of the disciples. The women were filled with joy when they heard the news. The disciples, on the other hand, were filled with disbelief and doubt. Could it be that this disbelief and doubt was the reason the disciples did not see Jesus immediately? When Jesus did appear to them later, He showed them His side and His hands and rebuked them for their disbelief. The women, on the other hand, though confused, seemed to believe what the angel told them and ran off to share the exciting news.

Why does Jesus leave this message with the women to give to His disciples? Why does Jesus not appear to the disciples at this point? Again we are not clearly told in this passage. The fact of the matter is that while God could speak to each of us personally, He often uses others to communicate His will and purpose. We are His messengers and ambassadors. These women who came to the tomb to show their reverence and respect for His body were the ones Jesus chose to use. These women were simple people who loved the Lord and wanted to honour Him in His death by anointing His body. Surely this shows us that the people God delights to use are those who honour and worship Him. The best preparation for ministry is not great education and experience but a heart that longs to honour and worship Him.

Mark tells us that when the women shared this message with the disciples, they found them weeping and mourning. When Mary told them that Jesus was alive and that she

## Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene and the Other 233 Women

had seen Him, they did not believe her. They were filled with doubt.

What would it take for these disciples to believe that Jesus was alive? The women left the tomb with joy in their heart because they truly believed that their Lord had risen from the dead. All through the life and ministry of Jesus, people came to Him asking for a sign. These individuals wanted proof before they would step out and believe. It seemed that no matter how many signs they saw, the crowds wanted yet another. The Lord refused to reveal Himself to these people. They wanted a sign before they would believe, but it was to those who believed that Jesus showed His signs. It was to these believing women that Jesus revealed Himself first. The disciples would have to wait.

These women took the angel at His word. They ran to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive not because they had seen Him personally but because they believed the word that was told them by the angel. It was only after they were on their way that Jesus showed Himself to them. Even though they did not understand, they believed and ran to tell the disciples. The disciples, on the other hand, were not at that point. They could not trust what these women had told them. They needed further proof.

Could it be that the reason we do not experience the Lord in a deeper way is because we are not providing the atmosphere in which the Lord can reveal Himself to us? Could it be that as sign seekers and intellectuals we need proof before we trust? As a result, God withdraws His presence from us until we can learn to trust and believe first. We have His Word, can we believe it like the women or will we doubt and demand more and more signs before we surrender to the truth?

## For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the importance of faith?
- Have you been a sign seeker who needs proof before you believe? What does this passage have to say to this?
- Is it possible that we are not seeing the Lord because we have not given Him the atmosphere of faith and trust?
- Have you ever found yourself doubting the promises of God's Word like the disciples in this passage? Explain.

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you faith to allow Him to work in your life.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have not trusted Him but demanded proof.
- Thank the Lord that He wants to reveal Himself to you. Ask Him to open your heart to believe even when you do not fully understand.
- Thank the Lord that He forgives our unbelief.

## THE GUARDS REPORT ON THE RESURRECTION

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Read Matthew 28:11-15

When the guards saw the angel at the tomb they fell down terrified. They knew that they were in serious trouble when the angel rolled away the stone. They had been given the responsibility to guard the tomb. To fail in this responsibility was to suffer the wrath of Rome.

While the women were on their way to see the disciples, the guards went into the city to tell the chief priests what had happened. They did not hold back anything. We can understand that they would have been quite overwhelmed and eager to tell what they had seen. They had never seen anything like this before.

When the chief priests heard what had happened, they called a meeting of the elders to decide what to do. If the story of what had happened had come from the disciples, the chief priests would have had cause to be suspicious but coming from the Roman soldiers it was quite different.

It would have been easy for the religious leaders to accuse the guards of making up the story. It is interesting to note, however, that the chief priests did not pursue this. Obviously, they could see the fear in the eyes of these soldiers as they spoke. They knew that something supernatural had happened. The fact that these guards were not the only ones to see the angel was also important. The women who had been to the tomb verified the testimony of the guards.

The chief priests and the elders feared this report would get out. If the people heard what these soldiers said there would be trouble in the land. They would not be able to stop Christians from spreading their message about Jesus. They had to do something before this word got out to the general population.

The chief priests and the elders gave the soldiers a large sum of money. In return, the soldiers were to tell everyone that Jesus' disciples came during the night and stole the body while they were asleep. They were also told that if this report reached the ears of the governor, they would speak on their behalf. The soldiers agreed and did as they were told. This was the story that circulated among the Jews of that day.

There are many people in this world who have never heard of Jesus and the work He did on the cross. They are unbelievers because they have never heard the message of the gospel. Others have heard but it just does not make sense to them because the Spirit of God has not yet opened their minds and hearts to understand. There is another group, however, who know and understand the truth of the gospel but refuse to accept it no matter how clear it is to them. They have had opportunities to accept Him but they have chosen to reject His message. They have turned

their backs on what they know deep down inside to be true. These people are not just unbelievers but rebels against the truth. This was true of the chief priests and elders. Every evidence had been presented to them but they refused it all. This is a dangerous place to be.

The writer to the Hebrews warns us about continuing to live in rebellion when we have come to understand the truth. Listen to what he says in Hebrews 10:26-27:

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

There is no forgiveness for the sins of those who persist in refusing the only means of salvation offered them. The chief priests saw the evidence around them but absolutely refused to accept it. They would die defending their traditions and religious beliefs.

Just one more word needs to be said about the soldiers. They had been paid to be quiet but they would live with the truth they saw that day. Each day they enjoyed their wealth they would have to realize that they obtained this wealth at the cost of a lie. They chose wealth over the truth. There are many things that we can choose over the truth. Some, like the chief priests and elders, choose their false religions and traditions. Others choose their reputation. Still others, like these soldiers, choose money or a job. We cannot run from truth. One day we will all have to answer to God for how we responded to the truth He revealed to us.

## For Consideration:

- What is the difference between unbelief and rebellion?
- What kind of things can keep us from accepting the truth of the Word of God today?
- What stands between you and the truth today?

## For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you a heart that is soft to the message of the gospel.
- Do you know someone who is living in rebellion against the truth? Take a moment to pray that the Lord would break this rebellion.
- Thank the Lord that He softened your heart to the truth so that you responded to it when He revealed it to you.

## ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

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Read Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35

We have seen how the Lord appeared to the women at the tomb. Jesus also appeared to others before returning to His Father. Two of the disciples were on their way to the town of Emmaus when the Lord Jesus appeared to them. Mark tells us that He appeared to them in a different form (Mark 16:12). We are not told what was different about the appearance of the Lord Jesus but He was not clearly recognized by the disciples.

Luke tells us that Emmaus was about seven miles from the city of Jerusalem. From Luke 24:18 we understand that one of the disciples who met with Jesus that day was a man by the name of Cleopas. Some people believe that because this was the time of the Passover it may be that Cleopas was returning home after being in Jerusalem for the celebration.

As they walked, Cleopas and His friend were engaged in a conversation. They were speaking to each other about the things that had happened when they were in

Jerusalem during the Passover. They had witnessed the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. They were quite troubled about what they had seen those days.

As they discussed these events, Jesus came alongside of them. Luke tells us that they were kept from recognizing Him. They certainly were not expecting to see Jesus walking with them especially after witnessing His death in Jerusalem.

As Jesus joined Cleopas and His friend He asked them what they were talking about. That question was not an easy one for them to answer. Luke 24:17 tells us that they stood still with a downcast look on their faces. Their hopes had been shattered.

Cleopas spoke out, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (Luke 24:18). He was quite surprised that this stranger had not heard about these events.

Jesus asked Cleopas to explain to Him what events he was speaking about. Cleopas told Him it was about Jesus of Nazareth who was a prophet, very powerful in word and deed. He told Him how the chief priests and the rulers of the people handed Him over to be sentenced to death and how they had crucified Him. Cleopas explained that they had been hoping that Jesus was the one who would redeem Israel. This being the third day since He had died, however, they had lost hope.

Cleopas told Jesus how some women had been at the tomb earlier that morning and found it empty. Some angels told these women that He was alive. He also told Jesus that one of his companions had been to the tomb that morning and confirmed that it was empty but no one had

seen Jesus. Cleopas and his friend were confused. They could not understand what had happened and what to think of these events.

After listening to him, Jesus rebuked Cleopas and His friend for being slow of heart to believe what the prophets had foretold. He opened up the Word of God to them and shared with them how Moses and all the Prophets spoke about the events that had just unfolded. The fact that all these events had been prophesied would have given Cleopas and his friend some hope.

As they approached the village of Emmaus, Jesus acted as if He was going to go farther (Luke 24:28). The two disciples, however, urged Him strongly to stay with them because it was getting dark. Jesus accepted their invitation. Why did Jesus act as if He was going to continue His journey? He certainly may have continued His journey had He not been invited to stay. While we don't have a clear answer to this we know that the same principle is true today as well. Jesus is pictured in the book of Revelation standing outside the door waiting for it to be opened (Revelation 3:20).

The Spirit of God had been challenging these two disciples on the way to Emmaus. They heard the testimony of the women who found the tomb empty. They heard how Peter had gone to the tomb and confirmed that Jesus was no longer there. Now they had heard how the prophets had foretold all these events. All these facts had been given to them yet they were not yet at the point of true faith. Information alone can never save. The picture before us is one of two disciples with all the information they needed but their eyes were still closed to the fact that Jesus was in their presence.

These disciples needed to move beyond the intellectual facts about Jesus to knowing Him personally. For this to take place they needed to invite Him to fellowship with them. They needed to open their hearts to Him. You can hear the truth and you can see evidence all around you but the time will come when you will have to open your heart to Him personally. Unless you open your heart to Him He will continue on His way and remain a stranger to you.

Only when you open your heart to Him and invite Him in will you know Him and the intimacy of His presence. Don't let Him continue His journey. Invite Him right now to come in. You have seen the evidence. You have heard the word but you must now make your decision. Either you let Him continue His journey or you invite Him in.

Because He was invited into their home, the Lord Jesus stayed with them. They sat down at the table and Jesus took bread and broke it, handing it to the disciples. As they received it, their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Many people want proof before they open their lives. These disciples only had assurance when they opened their hearts and home first to Jesus. If we open our heart to Him He will reveal Himself to us.

Luke 24:31 tells us that as soon as the disciples recognized Jesus, He disappeared from their sight. As the disciples reflected on what had happened, they recognized how their hearts had burned while Jesus opened the Scriptures to them. The power of the Spirit of God had been present as Jesus opened up His Word.

In response to what had happened the disciples got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. Remember, it was now dark. But things could not wait. They needed to share what they had seen and heard. When they arrived in Jerusalem,

they met with the eleven disciples and explained what had happened. Mark 16:13 tells us:

These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

It appears that the disciples in Jerusalem still had trouble believing that the Lord had risen from the dead. Would you have believed? The doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead did not come easy for the church. The early disciples wrestled to accept this vital truth. I am glad that the Scriptures show us how difficult it was for the disciples to accept the resurrection. This shows me that they were not interested in making up a story about Jesus. They wanted to know the truth. It was only when they were absolutely convinced of the reality of the resurrection that they accepted it without reserve. This doctrine would become the foundation of their faith. It would bring hope and meaning to all the confusing events that had taken place over the last few days. The truth of the resurrection still brings hope to a confused and troubled world.

For Consideration:

- What keeps us from seeing the Lord today?
- Why is it important for us not only to hear and understand the Word of God but also to open our heart to it? Can information about Jesus alone save us?
- Is it possible to know all the facts about Jesus and not to know Him personally?

- Why is the doctrine of the resurrection so important? Where would we be today if Jesus did not rise from the dead?
- Why was it so difficult for the disciples to accept the truth of the resurrection? How does this prove to us that the resurrection was not a story the disciples made up?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to Him in a deeper way as He did to the disciples on the road to Emmaus.
- Thank the Lord that He desires to reveal Himself to us.
- Thank the Lord for the truth about His resurrection. Thank Him for the hope that this truth brings us today?
- Do you know people who know all about Jesus but who have never opened their hearts to Him? Ask the Lord to bring them to a point of true understanding and salvation.

## CHRIST APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES

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Read Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43

To this point, the Lord Jesus had appeared to the women at the tomb and to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. While His own disciples had not seen the Lord, they had heard testimonies of others who had seen Him. I find it quite striking that the Lord would not appear first to those who had been closest to Him.

We are not told why the Lord did not appear to the eleven first. The disciples were suspicious of the accounts of those who had seen Him. It would have been quite humbling for the disciples to see others come to them with glowing accounts of an encounter with the risen Lord and yet they themselves had not seen Him.

When Jesus finally appeared to the eleven disciples they were eating together and speaking about these matters. Suddenly He came into their midst. Luke tells us that the disciples were afraid, thinking they were seeing a ghost.

"Peace be with you" Jesus said (Luke 24:36). Even when they saw Him, they still found it difficult to believe it was really Him. Jesus addressed this fear and disbelief in Mark 16:14 by rebuking their "stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen Him after He had risen."

These disciples had much to learn. They were unbelieving and without much faith, but God was not finished with them. He still had a wonderful purpose for their lives. They would become mighty instruments in His hands for the expansion of His kingdom. We need to be encouraged in this. We have often failed our Lord. Our faith has not always been what it should be. We have fallen into temptations and failed to please Him in what we do. Praise be to God who uses imperfect servants to accomplish His purposes on this earth. These same disciples who are rebuked by Jesus for their lack of faith would advance the cause of Christ and build His church. We too can be instruments like them for the cause of our Lord.

That evening Jesus addressed the doubts and fears in the minds of His disciples. He showed them His hands and His feet. He told them to touch Him and see that He did have flesh and bones. He was not a ghost. What is surprising here is that despite the Lord showing them His hands and feet, the disciples still did not believe (Luke 24:41). Luke tells us that they didn't believe because of joy and amazement. In other words, listening to what Jesus was saying to them seemed really too good to be true. There had been so much bad news over the last few days that they could not imagine that such a wonderful reality could be true. They had heard testimony of others who had seen Jesus and believed. The disciples, however, saw Jesus themselves but still struggled to believe.

Seeing that they were still unbelieving, Jesus asked if they had anything to eat. They gave Him some fish and He sat down with them and ate in their presence. The intention was to show them that He was not a ghost as they supposed. As the disciples lingered in His presence, they began to see that He was who He said He was. The more the disciples looked at Him and spoke to Him, the more they were convinced. This was true for the disciples on the way to Emmaus. Only as they lingered in the presence of Jesus did they finally see Him to be all He claimed He was.

It was important for the gospel writers to communicate that Jesus had a physical body when He appeared after His resurrection. Jesus did not rise only in Spirit but also in body. His body had flesh and bones. The disciples proved this by touching Him. He also sat down to eat with the disciples, something a spirit would not need to do.

The fact that Jesus had a physical body after His resurrection shows us that Jesus did rise from the dead. His body was no longer in the grave. He was not a ghost or a spirit but a living and breathing person with a physical body. His victory over death was complete. Death could not keep His body or His spirit. In His physical body He appeared to His disciples, proving that He truly had conquered death.

The resurrection of Jesus' physical body also gives us hope. We too will rise from the dead not just in spirit but also in body. We will live in heaven not as spirits but as human beings with flesh and bones. It is true that those bodies will be new and unhindered by sin, sickness and disease but they will be real bodies of flesh and bones (see 1 Corinthians 15:35-44).

What a wonderful hope we have. Jesus rose from the dead not just in spirit but also in body. We have hope and

confidence now that we, too, can experience that same resurrection.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the type of servants the Lord uses? What weaknesses do the disciples of this passage demonstrate? Do we need to be perfect for God to use us?
- How important is it to linger in the presence of the Lord? What happened when the disciples lingered in Jesus presence?
- Why is it important that we understand that Jesus rose from the dead not just in spirit but also in the flesh? What difference would it make if Jesus did not rise from the dead physically?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is able to use those who are imperfect.
- Ask the Lord to heal you of your unbelief and increase your faith.
- Ask the Lord to teach you more of what it means to linger in His presence.
- Thank the Lord that He rose physically from the dead. Thank Him that we too will rise from the dead to serve Him in new bodies of flesh and bone.

## THE GREAT COMMISSION

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Read Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18

Jesus has just met His disciples for the first time after His resurrection. During that time He rebuked them because of their unbelief. He reminded them that He had sent messengers to them but they had refused to believe. He came to them and showed them His hands and feet and yet they still struggled to believe. It is in this context of doubt and disbelief that the Lord Jesus gives His great commission to the disciples.

Notice that the theme of disbelief continues. Matthew tells us that when the disciples saw Jesus, they worshiped Him but some doubted (Matthew 28:17). These doubters were the ones who would go into the world with the message of the gospel. They were not perfect but they were the Lord's choice. As they stepped out in obedience, He would equip and shape them. He would move in them by His Holy Spirit and change them.

Jesus told His disciples that all authority had been given to Him in heaven and on earth. He was the undisputed Lord

of the earth. Heaven recognized His authority. He had been obedient to the cross and had conquered sin, Satan and the grave. By His conquest, He proved that He was Lord. What He said could not be questioned either in heaven or on earth. No force of hell could stand against His word. No human government or authority could contest what He said.

On the basis of this authority, Jesus told His disciples that He was calling them to go and make disciples of all nations. A disciple is a follower of Jesus. These doubters were asked to go and make disciples of the nations. Jesus was giving them an awesome responsibility. Notice that Jesus was very specific. They were to go to the nations. Jesus had limited His own ministry to the region of Jerusalem and Galilee. He challenged His disciples to move beyond this. They were to see the world as their field to harvest. They were to take the message to the entire world. In saying this, the Lord Jesus was telling His disciples that He was interested in the whole world. Jesus wanted them to think big. We can imagine how these doubting disciples were challenged by these words. Jesus was calling them to something far bigger than themselves. They could not possibly have understood how this calling could be fulfilled in their lives.

Notice also that Jesus called His disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Personally, I see baptism as a covenant agreement between God and His people. A covenant is a two way promise. God promises to be our God, to guide and keep us. We promise to love and obey Him as His children. Like a wedding, baptism is a public ceremony that shows the world that we have entered a special relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our God and we belong to Him. By baptism we make a declaration of our relationship with the Lord

God and our commitment to be faithful to Him alone. The disciples were to encourage these followers to enter this special committed and faithful relationship to the Lord God as their only Lord and King. Baptism was a symbol of that commitment.

The third area of calling for the disciples was to teach these new believers all that Jesus had taught them. There was to be an ongoing discipleship of these new converts. It is easy to evangelize and baptize but not so easy to persevere in teaching new converts. Jesus wanted His disciples to nurture and train those who came to Him in the truth of His Word. This teaching took many forms for the disciples. It came in their preaching and teaching. It also came in the form of correction and discipline in the churches they worked with. Paul, in particular, chose to write letters to the churches. By this means he instructed them in the words of Jesus.

These disciples did not, at that time, understand just how much influence they would have in the name of Jesus around the world. They were simple followers who wrestled with doubt just as we do, but they were mightily used of God.

I can imagine that the disciples were overwhelmed by what they heard that day. How was it possible for them to do what Jesus was asking them to do? Jesus reminded them that He would be with them always, to the very end of the age. He would send His Holy Spirit to live in them and empower them to do what He was calling them to do. The Holy Spirit would never leave them. He would be with them wherever they went. That same promise is for us as well. We can step out boldly because Jesus promises to be with us and lead us too.

In Mark 16:16, Jesus told His disciples that whoever believed what they spoke and was baptized as a sign of that belief would be saved. Mark is not making baptism a requirement for salvation here. He is simply asking that those who know the salvation of the Lord declare their commitment to Him through baptism. Jesus promised that those who believed the message these disciple preached would be saved from their sin and rescued from an eternity without God. On the other hand, those who turned their backs on it would be condemned for eternity.

Jesus told His disciples that there would also be signs accompanying those who believed. Notice that these signs would be given to “those who believed.” While the apostles were gifted by God in this way, the promise was not limited to them. All who accepted the message of salvation would be similarly empowered. They would receive power over demons so that they could drive them out of those who were oppressed. They would also speak in new tongues. Some see a reference here to the fact that these disciples would be sent to foreign people to win them to the Lord. The tongues of Acts 2 seem to have this focus. Paul also speaks of the gift of tongues that would be given to the body for personal edification and, with interpretation, edification for the church (see 1 Corinthians 14:1-5).

Notice also that miracles would be performed by those who believed. Mark 16:18 tells us that they would be divinely protected by God. They would pick up poisonous snakes with their hands and drink poison and not be affected. This is not an invitation to attempt these things but it certainly is an encouragement to know that we will be kept from the efforts of the enemy to destroy us.

Beyond this, Mark tells us that these new believers would place their hands on the sick and they would get well. What

we need to understand here is that these disciples went out not only with word but with power. They would break down the power of the devil by the word they spoke but also as they pushed back the strongholds of the enemy in miraculous ways. God was calling them not only to preach that the kingdom of God had come but also to demonstrate it in power.

Jesus called these doubting disciples to be His representatives in reaching the entire world for His name. He would not leave them powerless. He would go with them and empower them so that they could accomplish all that He had called them to do. God will also empower us as we obey His call.

#### For Consideration:

- What encouragement do you receive from the fact that the Lord used doubting disciples to advance His kingdom?
- The challenge of the Lord here was for His disciple to think big and reach out to the entire world. How big is your vision? What is God saying to you about your vision?
- How important is it to disciple those who have come to Christ?
- God calls us not only to preach the truth but also to demonstrate it. What evidence of the power of God is there in your life and ministry?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He uses us despite our weaknesses and lack of faith.
- Ask the Lord to increase your vision. Ask Him to give you faith for greater things for His kingdom
- Pray that God would not only enable you to preach the truth but also demonstrate it with power.

## THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT

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Read Luke 24:44-49

In the last meditation, the Lord Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into the entire world to preach the gospel. He told them that He would be with them as they went. While they were likely comforted by the fact that Jesus would be with them, these disciples were still confused. How were they to go to the entire world when they really didn't even understand the basics of what had just happened themselves? Jesus died and rose from the dead. What did that mean for them? What was the message they were to preach? The disciples had many questions. How could they preach what they did not fully understand themselves? Jesus understood their confusion and took the time to speak to them about what had taken place.

He reminded His disciples that the Old Testament spoke about the Christ who would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. The result of His death would be repentance and forgiveness of sin through His name. The disciples were to preach the message of forgiveness of sin

through the name and work of the Lord Jesus, the prophesied Messiah.

Jesus showed His disciples how the Scriptures spoke of Him and His work. If the disciples were going to be His witnesses, they would need to understand that the message they proclaimed was solidly based on the teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures. In pointing them to the Scriptures, Jesus was giving His disciples an example to follow. Their ministry was to point people to the Scriptures that spoke of Christ. These Scriptures were their authority. As He commissioned His disciples, Jesus reminded them that their message was the message of the Scriptures. It was not a new message but one that had been in the plan and purpose of God from the beginning of time, recorded wonderfully in the pages of the Word they read each Sabbath. Jesus was calling His disciples to open the Word of God to the nations, showing them that it revealed Christ as the prophesied Messiah and the hope of the world. Their ministry would be solidly based on the truth of these Scriptures.

If we are to do the work God has called us to do, we must bring people to His Word. The Word of God must play an important role in our ministries. It is our sword in the battle. It is our guide into truth and practice. No disciple will ever reach His or her full potential in ministry without the Word of God. To be effective in service we need to master the Scriptures. In our day, we are constantly seeking a new revelation. All too often, however, we have failed to take the time to understand the truth God has already revealed to us in the Bible. We become experts in programmes and new methods but know very little about the Scriptures.

In commissioning His disciples, Jesus points them to the Word of God as their authority. As I write, I am trying to put

myself in the place of these disciples. They were confused about what had happened. They really didn't know what they were to preach or how they were to advance the kingdom. In pointing them to the Scriptures, Jesus gives them their message. The message they were to preach was already laid out for them in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures. As they studied them in light of the events that had taken place over those last few days, they would see that they spoke clearly of Him. Jesus challenged them to search the Scriptures to see what they said about Him and to preach that message to the world.

While the Word of God is essential if we are to be effective ministers of the gospel, it is not enough. Jesus also told His disciples that He was going to send them what His Father had promised (Luke 24:49). They were to remain in the city of Jerusalem until that promise was fulfilled. He told them that when the promise was fulfilled they would be clothed with power from on high. What was this promise of the Father?

The promise of the Father was that He would send the Holy Spirit to them. While their message was clear, Jesus told His disciples that they were not to leave the city of Jerusalem with that message until the Holy Spirit had clothed them with power. It was not enough to have an understanding of the Scriptures and be able to teach them. To be effective, these disciples needed also to be clothed with power. The Word of God alone will not convince anyone. It is only when the Holy Spirit empowers and gives understanding of that Word that lives are truly changed. The apostle Paul understood this when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:4-5:

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of

the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

It is quite possible to preach the truth and yet not do so in the power and anointing of the Spirit of God. Have you ever been in a church where the truth is preached but lives were not being changed? The truth is preached with accuracy and great knowledge and people are coming to a better understanding of the facts but those facts don't change their lives. What a difference it makes, however, when the simple truth is preached under the power and anointing of the Spirit of God. Lives are changed. Sin is revealed and the kingdom of God advances. Truth preached without power can be intellectually stimulating. Truth preached in the power of the Spirit is life changing.

There is another aspect to the ministry of the Spirit we need to mention. We have all met people who have preached the truth with a harsh and judgmental spirit. Without the Spirit of God we can become proud and critical. Only when the Spirit of God dwells in us can we properly handle the truth. When the Spirit of God dwells in us we demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). Instead of criticism, pride and bitterness, we show love, joy, patience and kindness. If we want to minister the Word as God requires, we will need to be filled with the fruit of His Spirit not only to preach in power but to preach with the right attitude. The truth must be preached in a way that demonstrates the fruit of God's Spirit. To preach in any other way will only do more damage to the kingdom than good. The Spirit comes to prepare us to handle the truth we preach in a way that honours Him and brings glory to His name.

Jesus reminded His disciples that the message they preached was the message of the Scriptures themselves.

As His servants, they were to know and preach those Scriptures. That Word, however, was not enough. They also needed the Holy Spirit not only to empower the Word they preached but also to prepare them to preach it in a way that honoured Him.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this passage about the importance of the Word of God in our ministry?
- Why is it important that those who preach and share the word be filled and empowered by the Spirit of God?
- What is the difference between the Word preached in the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word taught with human intellect and reason?
- What role does the Holy Spirit play in preparing our hearts and lives to preach the Word in a way that honours God?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to open your mind to the teaching of the Word of God. Ask Him to give you quality time to meditate on it.
- Ask the Lord to fill you with His Holy Spirit so that you will be enabled to share with authority and humility of the Spirit.

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to empower us by His Holy Spirit to reach the world for His sake.
- Ask God to use you this week to share His Word in power.

## 50

# JESUS RETURNS TO HIS FATHER

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Read Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53

After commissioning His disciples to go into the world with the good news of salvation, Jesus led them to a solitary place in Bethany. There He lifted His hands and blessed them. As He spoke, He was lifted up to heaven. We can only imagine what was going through the minds of the disciples as they watched Him leave. There was no question where He was going. Mark tells us that He was taken to be at the right hand of the Father (Mark 16:19).

This incident is significant for what it represents. First, it represents the Father's approval of Jesus' ministry. The Father, who was forced to reject His Son at the cross, now received Him and gave Him a place of honour and authority at His right hand. It is clear from this that the work of the Lord Jesus perfectly satisfied the Father's demands. We can have confidence in the work of Christ on our behalf.

Second, Christ's ascension into heaven is important because it showed His disciples who Jesus really was. They had seen the crucifixion. They had witnessed His resurrection from the dead. Now they saw Him ascend to the Father to take His place of authority and power. What a comfort it was to know that the Lord who was sending them out was seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He had authority and power. He was Lord and King over all and they were His servants speaking with His authority to the world.

The ascension of the Lord Jesus also gave the disciples hope. They saw that their Lord had not only conquered death but rose to be with His Father. They knew that the day was coming when they too would rise to be with their Lord in the presence of the Father. They knew that as they went out their enemies could kill their bodies but they would be victorious over death. They were guaranteed a place in the presence of their Lord for eternity. What courage this would have given them as they went out in His name to preach the good news.

When the disciples saw Christ ascending into heaven they fell down and worshipped. He was the Lord. He was worthy of all their praise and worship.

After this incredible event, the disciples returned to Jerusalem. Luke 24:53 tells us that they stayed in Jerusalem praising and worshipping the Lord God. This is where they had been told to stay until they had received the power Jesus promised to give them.

When that power finally came they went out and preached what the Lord had taught and showed them. Mark 16:20 tells us that the apostle's teaching was confirmed by demonstrations of the Spirit's power. Notice the purpose

of the powerful demonstrations in Mark 16:20. These demonstrations of power were intended to confirm the words the apostles preached. The preaching of the Word was central in the apostle's ministry. The signs and miracles were intended to prove that the message they preached was from God. Unfortunately, people can get caught up in the demonstrations of power and not even consider the message they seek to confirm. Jesus refused to do His signs in the presence of those who would not listen to His message (Mark 8:11-13). God will confirm the truth we preach with signs but those signs should never become more important than the truth. Signs confirm the message but it is the truth empowered by the Spirit changes lives.

Only as we minister in the power of the Spirit of God can we see lasting change in the lives of those who need the Lord. We don't need more programmes or human effort. We need men and women today who, like the disciples, preach the Word of God and live in the power of the Spirit of God. May God stir up a renewed passion for the truth of His Word and the empowering presence of the Spirit. By His truth and the work of the Spirit alone can this world be radically changed.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this passage about the importance of the ascension of Jesus? What does this ascension teach us?
- What is the connection here between preaching and demonstrating the power of the Spirit of God?

- Do we need to see demonstrations of God's power today? How is God's power demonstrated in your everyday life?
- What is the purpose of signs and miracles according to Mark 16:20? How do we find balance between these signs and the preaching of the truth of the Gospel? Have we always found that balance?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is risen from the dead and seated at the place of authority in heaven.
- Ask the Lord to demonstrate the power of His kingdom in a greater way through you as you live and preach the truth of His Word.
- Thank God that He wants to use you to demonstrate the reality of Christ's life to the world. Commit yourself afresh to being His instrument in a needy world.

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## **Light To My Path Book Distribution**

Light To My Path (LTMP) is a book writing, publishing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing books with a goal to distribute them freely or at cost price to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

To date tens of thousands of books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated into a number of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith based ministry and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books?

For more information about Light To My Path visit our website at <http://ltmp-homepage.blogspot.ca>