

# The New European Bible Commentary: Luke

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## CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us-* "The things ["matters"]" believed are those of Acts 8:12, the things about the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. But the "things" of the gospel are the "things" of the gospel records. The gospels are transcripts of how e.g. Luke preached the gospel. So the gospel message, "the things" of the Gospel, are to be found in the gospels. The gospel is not a theology collected from the whole New Testament.

Luke saw the whole of the Old Testament as having its fulfilment in the story of Jesus. He introduces his Gospel record as an account "of those matters which have been fulfilled" (Lk. 1:1 RV). And "those matters" he defines in Lk. 1:2 as the things of "the word". The RV especially shows his stress on the theme of fulfilment (Lk. 1:20, 23, 37, 45, 54, 55, 57, 70). In essence he is introducing his Gospel just as John does.

1:2 *Even as they delivered them to us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word-* The "many" of :1 who had tried to draw up a narrative of the Lord's life and work had handed their eyewitness accounts to Luke, who was now collating them. Perhaps Luke did this in preparation of evidence for Paul's trials at Caesarea and / or Rome. Luke says that the eyewitness accounts had been handed to "us". He may be using the 'royal we' [i.e. referring only to himself] or to a group for whom he acted as inspired secretary. So Luke's inspired Gospel was compiled from the testimonies of "those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the word" (Lk. 1:2,3). Some of the events he records could only have been told him by women; and so the Spirit accepted their witness, and encouraged them to make it because *God* accepted their witness. Only women were witnesses of the Lord's burial- yet belief in His burial is listed by Paul as an essential part of the faith. Yet the only reason the early believers had to believe this was the testimony of women.

Luke saw the link between the Lord's death and His whole life when he says that they had been "eyewitnesses" of the Lord's ministry, using the Greek word for autopsy- Luke saw his record of the Lord's life as being an autopsy of His death (Lk. 1:2). Here we find what we shall often note throughout Luke's writings- the usage of medical language.

1:3 *It seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write to you in order, most excellent Theophilus-* Luke's Gospel was written for the purpose of preaching to Theophilus, who had already been 'catechized', taught by rote (:4), one of the Gospels (probably Mark), but who wanted to have a more detailed and factual account. Luke later describes his Gospel as his *logos*, his 'word' about all Jesus did (Acts 1:1 Gk.). The Lord seems to have foreseen this when He spoke of how "Wherever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman has done, be told for a memorial of her" (Mt. 26:13). There is evident connection with the Lord's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So 'preaching the Gospel' is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry. Luke's address to "Most Excellent Theophilus" may be a reference to the Roman-imposed High Priest of Israel between AD 37 and AD 41, Theophilus ben Ananus.

1:4 *That you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught-* The history of Jesus was something in which a new convert was "instructed" or [Gk.] catechized, as if the Gospel record was learnt by repetition. This is understandable given the largely illiterate nature of society at the time. Luke as a serious historian mentions his sources, describing them as "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word". The Greek *hyperetes* which translates "ministers" is the Greek form of the Hebrew *hazzan*. The word recurs in Lk. 4:20, about the "minister of the synagogue". The task of the minister was to look after the scrolls- "the chest with the books was brought in to the synagogue when required from an adjoining room and brought back there afterwards". Luke's idea is that instead of humping a bunch of scrolls around, the 'ministers' were the eyewitnesses who recited what they had heard of Jesus. But because they would die out, there was a need for people like Luke to compose documents which recorded their testimony.

1:5 *There was in the days of Herod, king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah, and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron and her name was Elisabeth-* Luke is careful throughout to present everything with detailed historical accuracy, and his inspired accounts have held up against the bitterest critics. Any uninspired account would surely have gaping holes in it which the critics would by now have exposed. For writing history of events over a 50 year period in those days would surely reveal errors of history, geography and other fact unless the account was inspired.

1:6 *And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless-* These words are applied to us all in Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 3:13. We are to have the serene spirituality, all down the years, of Zacharias and Elizabeth. Zacharias was "blameless" in God's sight, even though in this very period of his life he was in some ways lacking faith that his prayers would be answered. Paul talks of being "righteous before God" in Romans, perhaps also borrowing this language; and he argues that we have this status only by faith in imputed righteousness. For of ourselves, none can be right before God. Nor of course can any man apart from the Lord Jesus claim to walk in the Father's laws "blameless". In God's sight / presence no man is justified (Ps. 143:2). It could be that this status was applied to them through their faith in forgiveness, in the implications of the promises to David and Abraham, which Zechariah so well understood according to his song of praise at the end of this chapter.

1:7 *And they had no child, because Elisabeth was barren and they both were now well stricken in years-* The record is deconstructing the common idea that the fruit of the womb would be given to the righteous, and withheld from the unrighteous. They walked blameless, as Job apparently did (Job 1:1), but still "trouble came".

1:8 *Now it came to pass, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his division-* The very process of service and obedience leads to greater faith in practice. It was *whilst* Zacharias went about his service to the Lord that we was given the news that he would finally have a son. And we all find this true. As we enter more deeply and more passionately into the things of the Lord, so He leads us further into new understandings and fresh areas of endeavour. According to the AV of Gen. 24:27, it was whilst Abraham's servant was "in the way" of going God's path, that he was led by God to find the fulfilment of his mission in getting a wife for Isaac: "I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren". There is a similar idea in Acts 13:2: "And as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said: Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which I have called them".

1:9 *According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to enter into the temple of the Lord and burn incense-* This honour was chosen by lot, and it fell upon Zacharias. And surely we have here an example of how the drawing of lots is at times overruled by God (Prov. 16:33). It was a tradition that no priest ever did this twice (*T. Bab. Yoma*, fol. 26. 1), and there were apparently 20,000 priests at this time. So Zacharias had waited all his life for this honour, and he was surely being nudged to see that he could also receive something he had waited all his life for, a child. This burning of incense had its reflection in the heavenly tabernacle (Rev.

8:3); or rather, the earthly tabernacle was a reflection of the heavenly. Hence *elohim* is used in the OT for both priests and Angels; the priests were to act as a copy of the Angelic system in the heavenly throne room. This is a common idea in Revelation, the comfort being that situations on earth are acted out in heaven, and through the operation of the vast Angelic system above us, man is not alone in this world. The incense represented prayer, not only of the people but of the offering priest personally; and Zacharias was being again nudged towards believing that his lifetime of prayer was actually getting through to God. But his disbelief of the answer indicates that he failed to perceive these things as intended.

1:10 *And the whole crowd of the people were praying outside in the hour of incense-* There is a triple emphasis on Israel praying to God in the lead up to the Lord's birth (Luke 1:10,13; 2:37). Joel 2:17 and many other passages suggest that the faithful remnant will likewise devote themselves to prayer in the last days; for the events at the Lord's first coming are typical of those at His second coming. The prayer of the crowd was represented by the cloud of incense. But Zacharias failed to perceive as he might have done that the incense also represented his own personal prayers; he was too focused upon the external service, and the general concept of prayer, that he overlooked this.

1:11 *And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense-* Here we see the priest's offering of incense paralleled with the prayer of the people, and in reply to these prayers and those of Zacharias an Angel comes and stands at the right hand of the altar of incense to announce the granting of the peoples' request (for forgiveness), and Zacharias' request for a child, in the form of the birth of John and his ministry of reconciliation with God. The incense altar represented the offering of prayer- the Angel coming to stand at the right side of the altar indicates answered prayer. The command from the altar (of incense?) in Rev. 9:14 to the sixth Angel telling Him to loose other Angels was maybe from this same Angel of answered prayer. All these suggestions need very careful development, especially guarding against making the Angels rather than Jesus our mediator. There is only one mediator (1 Tim. 2:5).

1:12 *Zacharias was disturbed when he saw him, and fear fell upon him-* The contrast is with Mary, who after her initial surprise, rejoiced that an Angel had come to answer her prayers for the Messianic child. His fear was related to a sense of sin that had not been dealt with; even though as noted on :6, God counted him righteous. This is comfort indeed; that we may feel guilty for sin, fear before God in a wrong sense, when in fact we are counted righteous by Him. We can take false guilt [as opposed to the true guilt we at times need to feel].

1:13 *But the angel said to him: Fear not, Zacharias, because your prayer is heard; your wife Elisabeth shall carry a son and you shall call his name John-* "Fear not" is said so often when Angels appear to men, and we will likely need to hear those words when the Angels are sent forth to gather us to judgment. Divine presence convicts of sin, and yet we are of course just as much in that presence constantly.

Because God responds to our spirit, our overall situation, sometimes He does things which seem to be an answer of prayers which were not properly believed in by the person who prayed. Examples include: Gen. 30:16,17; Ex. 14:10,11 cp. Neh. 9:9; Ps. 31:22; Lk. 1:13. Belief and unbelief can quite comfortably co-exist in a man (Mk. 9:24; Jn. 12:39-43). These prayers were answered because God saw the overall situation, He read the spirit of those who prayed and responded appropriately, even if their faith in their specific, vocalized prayers was weak. Perhaps in similar vein, James 4:6 appears to teach that God will hear the prayers of the humble man when a proud man is praying at the same time; faith is not mentioned here. In the light of this we notice how all the prayers of Zacharias are called in the singular "your prayer".

1:14 *And you shall have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth-* The Angel hoped that "many" would perceive in John's birth the good news of Messiah's soon appearing; for the rejoicing was to be because of his significance in God's plan (:15). But did "many" rejoice in this sense? Perhaps as with many such predictions, it is stating a potential rather than an actual truth. "Joy and gladness" is a term only used elsewhere about all of us as we look forward to the Lord's coming (1 Pet. 1:8). Zacharias and Elisabeth are therefore set up as every believer. See on :16.

1:15 *For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord. And he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb-* Paul seems to have admired the humility John the Baptist manifested in his preaching. He knew he had been chosen from the womb for his mission, as John had been (Gal. 1:15 = Lk. 1:15). Paul was keen for others to copy John the Baptist, to find in him the inspiration which he too had found. So he encourages his Ephesians not to drink wine but instead be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)- the very language of John (Lk. 1:15). In other words, 'Be like that Spirit-filled zealot John rather than enjoying the sloppy pleasures of this life!'

"John did no miracle" (Jn. 10:41) and yet he was filled with the Spirit. The promises of our likewise being filled with the Spirit are often discounted because we do not have the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. But being filled

with the Spirit is not the same as having the ability to do miracles. John was filled with the Spirit from the womb; so the filling of the Spirit is not solely in response to our own efforts. The idea here is that God had a plan for John, and John chose to follow it and walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). This is why Paul can lament that in one sense the Corinthians had been filled with the Spirit, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1), they were not living according to the potential made possible by the gift of the Spirit which is purely on God's initiative. The same term "filled with the Spirit" is used of both John's parents (:41,67). This was a little family open to being filled with the Spirit, and so they were filled. The appeal to allow ourselves to be "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18) shows we are to live open to and receptive of such filling.

1:16 *And many of the children of Israel shall be turned to the Lord their God-* "Many" – relatively- would be converted to the true ways of God by the work of John the Baptist, whilst numerically the majority of those who heard John's message eventually turned away from it, culminating in their crucifixion of the Messiah. See on Mt. 20:16. Or it could mean that many potentially could have been converted. Or many were converted- but fell away. This is the sense in which "many" is used in :14. "Many" were to rejoice at John's birth and significance before God. But how many did? "Many" potentially could have done.

The idea of hearts being turned to the Lord alludes to the intended work of the historical Elijah (1 Kings 18:37) which was to be achieved by the Elijah prophet who heralded Messiah (Mal. 4:6). This was only potentially true; Elijah only converted a minority. John the Baptist is prophesied as achieving this with "many"; but again, this did not happen. And so the prophecy is rescheduled for fulfilment in the work of the latter day Elijah prophet. As we go out into this world and meet apparent disinterest, we need to remember that potentially, people can respond. They are actually actively resisting what is potentially possible for them.

We note too that this passage and 1 Kings 18:37 speak of the Elijah prophet turning hearts to the Lord their God, whereas Mal. 4:6 speaks of hearts being turned in reconciliation within families, the fathers to the children and vice versa. This is the two-dimensional approach taken in the New Testament, especially in John's letters; reconciliation to God involves reconciliation with our brethren, and the two cannot be divorced from each other.

1:17 *And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord-* As noted on :16, if hearts turn to God then they turn to their own brethren. We cannot turn to God without turning to our brethren; baptism is into the body of Christ and not simply into a totally individual relationship with

the Father and Son. Latter day Israel will *turn* to the Lord their God, and part-and-parcel of this process will be the *turning* of the hearts of the fathers to the children (Lk. 1:16,17). When Israel earlier played traitor to their brethren, by doing so they broke their marriage covenant with God (Mal. 2:10); their attitude to their brethren was essentially their attitude to their Heavenly Father. Our God and our brethren simply can't be separated. Asa's broken relationship with God resulted in him 'crushing' the people at the same time (2 Chron. 16:10 AVmg.). See on Jn. 8:42.

Lk. 1:17 gives the Spirit's commentary upon Elijah's achievement. The "spirit and power" of Elijah had been to turn "the disobedient to the wisdom of the just" and to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord". And yet Elijah felt his ministry had been a failure; that nobody had responded. And yet his achievement with a minority is used as a prototype for the later achievement of both John the Baptist and the latter-day Elijah prophet. There's a great encouragement for us here. We may feel our witness, our ministry, even our life's work- be it in formal preaching, in raising children, in seeking to be the salt of the earth- has been without fruit. But actually, according to the pattern of Elijah, we may achieve far more ultimately than we realize, even if the fruits are seen after our death. What's important, as it was in Elijah's life, is the spirit and power we personally develop and set as an example; even if concretely and materially we don't achieve what we aim to in the lives of others. It was in this sense that God used Elijah, and uses us. Elijah's own "spirit" was imperfect- elitist, judgmental, angry etc. But his more essential spirit was focused upon by a loving, positive Father. This comforts us in our immaturities, and encourages us to view positively our brethren who seem stuck within the parameters of their natural personality and cannot, it seems, overcome all weaknesses of their spirit.

John's ministry failed, in that he did not prepare much of a people for the Lord Jesus. They crucified Him. But it was potentially possible. "Prepared" in Greek carries the idea of to create or build; there is introduced here the idea of a new creation of persons who would have their existence in the new order predicated upon their faith in Jesus.

1:18- see on Lk. 22:45.

*And Zacharias said to the angel: How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife well stricken in years-* Mary likewise had this question as to "how shall this be", but the same words were spoken with a different attitude. She believed, but was naturally curious to know the mechanical side of how a virgin was going to conceive. Zacharias asked the same question but from a motive of unbelief. The same words may be found on different lips, but are judged differently by God. This shows how we should not judge others' words not least because we cannot judge, we cannot see to the heart which is behind the external words and actions. In this case, like us so often, Zacharias listed all the human barriers to the

fulfilment of God's word, and considered them more powerful than the word of God.

It seems Zacharias probably said far more than "How shall I know this?" when Gabriel told him he would soon have a son. It would seem the conversation went on for so long that the people outside wondered why he was staying so long. Presumably he remonstrated with the Angel with other, graciously unrecorded words, and thereby earned the punishment of dumbness. At the shores of the Red Sea, it seems Moses' faith wavered, and he prayed something at best inappropriate. All we read is God's response: "Why do you cry to me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Ex. 14:15). It seems again that Moses' "cry" isn't recorded- by grace.

1:19- see on 3 Jn. 11.

*And the angel answering said to him: I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you these good tidings-* Answers to prayer are uttered in the heavenly throne room, in the presence of God and the Angels. Zacharias had been demonstrating this by offering the incense which passed into the holiest place, visually teaching that prayer really does get through to the presence of God. But he failed to grasp the reality that *his* prayers actually were like this. And an Angel had been sent from that Heavenly presence to a man on earth with good news of an answer which had already been decided- and the man failed to believe it. This is the case with how the "good tidings" of the Gospel have likewise been issued and taken to men- and they disbelieve.

1:20 *And you shall be dumb and not able to speak until the day that these things shall come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season-* Again, the case of Zacharias is compared unfavourably with that of Mary who believed, and who opened her mouth in joyful praise after accepting the good news. His unbelief must have been stubborn and pronounced; as noted on :18, his words of disbelief must have been extended enough for the people to wonder why he delayed so long in the temple. The words of Zacharias were to be limited because he had not believed God's words. Therefore when his mouth was opened, he spoke God's prophetic words; his words were God's words.

1:21 *And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple-* As noted on :18, the delay was long because he had apparently argued back with the Angel in denial that his prayers of his youth really could be answered now. It took half an hour to burn the incense (Rev. 8:1-3); the long delay means that he may have argued back with the Angel for at least another half an hour.

1:22 *And when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, and he continued making signs to them and remained dumb-* He was unable to utter the blessing of Num. 6:23-27. His lack of faith therefore resulted in a lack of blessing for the people he served. The lack of blessing was surely a hint that something was wrong with Israel; they needed repentance and radical reformation.

1:23 *And it came to pass, when his time of service was ended, he went to his home-* This could suggest that he retired from the priesthood. The raising of John the Baptist and preparation for Messiah were perceived by him as more important than continuing the Mosaic rituals. "Ended" is the same word used for how Zacharias and Elisabeth were "filled" with the Spirit (:41,67). We surely have here a hint at the passing over from the ministry of the law to that of the Spirit.

1:24 *And after these days Elisabeth his wife conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying-* To sleep with her on returning home was surely an act of faith. Perhaps this was why he went straight to his home (:23) rather than remaining in the temple. She "hid herself", perhaps by simply not going out of the house, in order to focus upon her relationship with the Father, and to avoid being caught up in all the inevitable gossip and conspiracy theories which would have arisen. The idea is that she hid herself because the Lord had done things to her.

1:25 *Thus has the Lord done to me in the days wherein he looked upon me, to take away my reproach among men-* She felt the Lord was looking upon her during her pregnancy; but she was blameless "before God", in His eyes / presence (:6). Yet the wonder of her status in His eyes was unappreciated as it might have been. We have the same problem. Her joy was that her "reproach among men" had been taken away, quoting the words of unspiritual Rachel in Gen. 30:23; we would think that she might instead have focused upon the huge significance of John in God's salvation purpose. But for all these human weaknesses, she and her husband were accepted before God.

1:26 *Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth-* The "sixth month" was presumably of Elisabeth's pregnancy. She concealed her pregnancy for five months (:24) and then announced it. Mary would have heard this, and been given the potential encouragement that with God, pregnancy was possible. And having been thus prepared for her challenge of faith, the angel comes and gives it to her. We too are prepared for our challenges to faith, often by meeting or hearing of others who have likewise endured. God chose a poor village girl who dreamt of being Messiah's mother, not one of the

Jerusalem elite. The word "Nazareth" may mean nothing to us in our age, but in first century Israel it was a term of contempt, for nothing good ever came out of that town (Jn. 1:46). To that dumb mountain village, to an illiterate teenager, there came an Angel with the amazing news that she had been chosen to bear God's Son.

*1:27 To a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary-* As she was a betrothed virgin, we can assume she was still a teenager; as most girls were married by 20. She was "of the house of David" and therefore her child would have in any case been the legitimate Davidic king of Israel. Over 90% of Luke's Greek is taken from the Septuagint. All the time he is consciously and unconsciously alluding to the Old Testament as having its fulfilment in the things of Jesus. As an example of unconscious allusion, consider Lk. 1:27: "A virgin betrothed to a man". This is right out of Dt. 22:23 LXX "If there be a virgin betrothed to a man...". The context is quite different, but the wording is the same. And in many other cases, Luke picks up phraseology from the LXX apparently without attention to the context.

*1:28 And he came in to her and said: Greetings, you that are highly favoured, the Lord is with you!*- See on :38. Mary is set up as the representative and epitome of all Israel / the people of God should have been. She was the seed of David, the daughter of Zion from whom Messiah came. The "highly favoured... blessed" woman is the daughter of Zion of Joel 2:21-27; Zeph. 3:14-17; Zech. 2:14,15; 9:9. She "rejoiced" as the daughter of Zion was to rejoice at the coming of her king. She was the "servant Israel", the "handmaiden" (the female form of "servant") who was now "holpen" by God (Lk. 1:54). "Blessed be the fruit (LXX offspring) of your womb" (Dt. 28:1,4) was the promise made to Israel- and these words are applied to Mary in Lk. 1:42. See on Rev. 12:5; Mt. 5:6.

Mary was "highly favoured"; yet the only other place the word occurs is in Eph. 1:6, where we are told that "He has made *us* accepted [highly favoured] in Christ". Thus in the thinking of Paul and the Spirit, Mary is to represent all of us.

Hannah's song was clearly a major influence in the mind of Mary. But there are some background similarities as well as the verbal ones. The LXX of 1 Sam. 1:18 [not the Hebrew text] speaks of Elkanah and Hannah staying in a *katalyma* on their journey to Shiloh- the very word used of the "inn" in whose stable Mary had to stay. If we ask *why* Mary based her song so heavily on that of Hannah, we find a clue in considering how she was greeted by the Angel as "favoured" (Lk. 1:28). The Greek *kecharitomene* virtually translates the Hebrew name 'Hannah'. The record

is written in Greek, but Mary was a Jewess and spoke Aramaic and Hebrew; and probably the Angel spoke to her in those languages. So the link would have been all the stronger- 'Hail, Hannah-like one'. And this set the mind of Mary thinking about Hannah, and in the days between hearing these words and meeting Elisabeth, Mary had perceived the similarities between her position and that of Hannah. She allowed the spirit of Hannah to genuinely become hers, in perceptive obedience to the Angel's bidding. She came to share God's perception of her as a woman like Hannah. 'Hannah' comes from the Hebrew root *hnn* – favour. Mary is told that she has been favoured / 'Hannah-ed' by God (Lk. 1:30)- as if to lead her to see the similarities between her and Hannah. And she responds magnificently, by alluding to Hannah's song so closely. Tragically as we shall see, she later came to be more influenced by the world's perception of both herself and her Son. The theme of joy is very great in her song- again, because she was obedient to the greeting "Hail!", literally, 'rejoice!'. The points of connection between the songs of Hannah and Mary's Magnificat are really quite detailed:

1 Samuel     Luke / Magnificat

1:3	1:7
1:18	:38, 30
2:1	:46
1:11	:48
2:2	:49
2:4	:51
:3	:51
:4	:52
:8	:52
:5	:53
:10	:69
:26	2:52

:10 anointed LXX "His Christ"- the first occurrence of 'Messiah' in the O.T.

And there are plenty of allusions in the Magnificat to other parts of Scripture and well known Apocryphal writings, especially the Psalms, which Mary evidently had committed to memory:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit has found gladness in God my Saviour;* Ps 35:9 Then my soul will find gladness in the Lord; It will take pleasure in His salvation. I Sam 2:1,2 (Hannah's hymn): My heart is strengthened in the Lord; My horn is exalted in my God...I delight in your salvation.

Hab. 3: 18 (Habakkuk's hymn): I shall find gladness in the Lord; I shall rejoice in God my Saviour.

*Because He has regarded the low estate of His handmaid-*

I Sam 1:11 (Hannah praying for a child): O Lord of Hosts, if you will look on the low estate of your handmaid,

Gen 29:32 (Leah after childbirth): Because the Lord has regarded my low estate.

4 Ezra 9:45 (Zion speaking as a barren woman): God heard you're your handmaid and regarded my low estate, And considered my distress and gave me a son.

*For behold, henceforth all generation will call me fortunate-*

Gen 30:13 (Leah after childbirth): Fortunate am I, for all women call me fortunate.

*Because He who is mighty has done great things for me.*

Deut. 10:21 (Moses to Israel): He is your God who has done great things in you.

Zeph. 3:17: The Lord your God is in you, A Mighty One will save you.

*And holy is His Name,*

Ps. 111:9: Holy and awesome is His name.

*And His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear Him.*

Ps 103:17:

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him.

Psalms of Solomon 13:11: His mercy upon those who fear Him.

*He has shown His strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones*

*and has exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.*

I Sam 2:7-8 (Hannah's hymn): The Lord makes poor and makes rich: He reduces to lowliness and he lifts up. He lifts the needy from the earth, and from the dung heap He raises up the poor to seat them with the mighty, making them inherit a throne of glory.

Ps. 89:11(10- a hymn praising God's action for the Davidic king): You have reduced the proud to lowliness like a wounded thing: And by your powerful arm you have scattered your enemies.

Sirach 10:14: He has put down the thrones of princes and has seated the humble before them.

Job 12:19: He has overthrown the mighty.

1QM xiv 10-11: You have raised the fallen by your strength, and have cut down the high and mighty.

Ezek 21:31 LXX (26 Heb.): Having reduced the proud to lowliness, and having exalted the man of low degree.

Ps 107:9: He has filled the soul of the hungry with good things.

*He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke unto our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity forever.*

Isa. 41:8-9: You, O Israel, My servant Jacob whom I chose, seed of Abraham whom I loved, whom I have helped from the ends of the earth.

Ps. 98:3: He has remembered His mercy to Jacob and His goodness to the House of Israel.

Psalms of Solomon 10:4: And the Lord will remember His servants in mercy.

Micah 7:20: You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Israel, as you have sworn to our fathers from days of old.

2 Sam. 22:51 (David's hymn at the end of his life) Showing mercy to His anointed one, to David and his posterity forever.

And a few more:

Luke

1:47 = Gen. 21:6

1:48 = Ps. 138:6 LXX; Gen. 30:13

1:49 = Ps. 126:2,3; 111:9

1:50 = Gen. 17:7

1:51 = Ps. 118:14,15.

1:29 *But she was greatly disturbed at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of greeting this might be-* She has a natural reaction of shock to the news, but unlike Zacharias, she gets over it and joyfully believes her ambitious prayers have been answered. "Cast in her mind" translates a word often used in Luke about people struggling within their minds to process the challenge of Christ, and coming down on the side of unbelief. Mary alone comes down on the side of belief (Lk. 3:15; 5:21,22; 12:17; 20:14). We all have these struggles, in which our faith and our unbelief struggle together. She wondered whether in fact the news was bad or good. And she came down to the obvious truth- that the Gospel of Christ is good news. Why should we wonder whether such positive greeting, "highly favoured... blessed" should in fact be a bad kind of greeting? We also have such language applied to us. The message of Christ is either the sickest trick- or what it claims to be, good news. Many refuse to believe it because we are wired to not believe good news, pure grace. But she is set up as an example to us all.

1:30 *And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary. For you have found favour with God-* The emphasis is that she *had* found favour with God, and she need not doubt the truth of those words of grace; see on :29.

When the LXX and Hebrew readings are combined, it becomes evident that the Angel is inviting Mary to see herself as the "daughter of Zion":

### **Zeph. 3**

Rejoice [LXX *chaire*], daughter of Zion (Zeph. 3)

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in the midst of you [*en meso sou*] (Zeph. 3)

### **Luke 1:28-31**

Rejoice [*chaire*]...[Mary] Notice how *chaire* is also addressed to the Daughter of Zion in Zech. 9:9, a passage also applied to Jesus in Mt. 21:5; Jn. 12:14,15.

The Lord is with you [*meta sou*]. "The king of Israel" was a well known Messianic title. He was in the midst of Mary in the

sense that He was now in her womb.

Do not be afraid, Zion  
(Zeph. 3)

Do not be afraid, Mary

The Lord your God is  
with / in you (Zeph. 3)-  
the Hebrew can imply  
'in your interior parts',  
cp. the womb

You have found favour with  
God. We can perceive a double  
meaning now in Zephaniah's  
words- the Lord God was with  
Mary, but was also within her  
manifest in His Son.

The mighty one will  
save you (Zeph. 3)

"God my Saviour"- as if Mary  
picked up the allusions and  
responded to them.

Lk. 1:30 is alluded to in Heb. 4:16. When you ask for forgiveness, be like Mary in her spiritual ambition in asking to be the mother of Messiah.

1:31 *And you shall conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus-* "You shall" may have the emphasis upon "shall"; her prayers for these things would indeed be answered. The whole language of conception, bringing forth, and the future tenses all combine to preclude the theory of any physical pre-existence of the Lord Jesus. He began, as a cell, dividing and subdividing until it became a foetus. And that was His personal beginning.

1:32 *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give to him the throne of his ancestor David-* Again we note the future tenses, precluding any personal pre-existence of the Lord. "He shall be great" is what Zacharias had just been told in :15. The response of Mary and Zacharias is clearly compared and contrasted; and the illiterate teenage girl comes out presented as a far stronger believer than the legally obedient Zacharias. Mary's Biblical mind [for she alludes to Scripture with such felicity] would have figured that God had to be the Father of the Davidic seed; and a woman in David's line, just like herself, had to be the mother. But how that was to come about was of course a challenge to her faith.

1:33 *And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end-* The Lord Jesus will have a Kingdom, the house of Jacob, which shall have no end. According to Isaiah, "of the *increase*" of His Kingdom there will be no end; surely meaning that the Lord's domination of the believers' minds will grow and grow; our relationship with Him will grow progressively deeper. The Lord's kingship over Jacob would be eternal, uninterrupted. It has not therefore fully begun. "His kingdom" and "the house of Jacob" are paralleled. His

domain, over which He is King, is therefore essentially a group of persons.

*1:34 And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be, seeing I do not know a man?*- So great is the depth of Mary's perception that I am led to make the suggestion that she may have actually comprehended that Isaiah 7:14 required a virgin to be made pregnant by God, and she was anticipating this happening. I am led to this possibility by musing upon her question here. She had been told that she was to bear the Son of God, Messiah, but initially she is not told that this would be due to the Holy Spirit coming upon her. Her response is to ask how this will be possible, seeing she doesn't know a man. Yet she was engaged to a man, and engagements in Galilee rarely lasted longer than a year. The obvious deduction for her would have been to think that when her and Joseph married, their child would be Messiah. So why does she ask how it can be, seeing she doesn't know a man sexually? Is there not here the implication that she had picked up on the Angel's allusion to Isaiah 7:14 and realized that it required a virgin to conceive in order to make the Messiah both Son of God and son of David through a woman? And so she asks how actually this is going to come about; as if to say 'OK I understand it requires a virgin conception, but how physically is it going to work out?'. Most marriages were arranged marriages; she had been betrothed to Joseph, but was earnestly praying to be mother of Messiah, and yet she realized that it required a virgin conception. And yet soon, she would be married. She must have feared that her life was going to become just like that of any other woman. But now with ecstatic joy she realized that God had heard her, and intervened. She was to have a virgin conception before she got married to Joseph! It must have all seemed too wonderful to be true, and yet she believed. One can only be impressed at the speed and depth of her response to the Angel. The Lord's same ability was surely at least partly inherited from His mother.

*1:35 And the angel answered and said to her: The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you. Therefore also the holy thing which is begotten within you shall be called the Son of God-* The Holy Spirit came upon her, and so Mary's spirit was full of gladness (:35,47). She walked in step with the spirit (Gal. 5:25). Because she believed that really the child she would bear would be "holy", she can extol God as "holy" (1:35,49). She says that God "Has done to me great things"- she believed that what was promised would actually happen, to the point she felt it had already happened. Now this surely is the essence of faith.

The Angel's description of Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary could have sent her mind back to how the Spirit-Cherubim and the cloud of Spirit glory overshadowed the ark (Ex. 25:20; 1 Chron. 28:18). The LXX uses the

word for "overshadow" about the cloud of glory overshadowing the ark in the wilderness (Ex. 40:35; Num. 9:18,22). If Mary's mind had been alerted to this possibility, she would have seen the relevance of Elizabeth's words: "Who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk. 1:43). For they are remarkably similar to the LXX of 2 Sam. 6:9, where David asks "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?". As a result of this question of David's, the ark remained three months in the house of Obed-Edom (2 Sam. 6:11). And was this why Mary, seeing herself as the ark, remained for three months in the house of Elisabeth straight after hearing this same question asked (Lk. 1:56)? There are further links, between the gladness of Lk. 1:44 and the joy of 2 Sam. 6:12; and the loud cry of Lk. 1:42 and that of 2 Sam. 6:15. If one combines Lk. 1:31 and Jn. 1:14 we have the word of God becoming flesh and "tabernacling" among us in the womb and faith of Mary. If these connections are valid, then Mary would have felt that within her was He who would be the covenant of the Lord, the stones of the word of God made flesh in a little boy. This was perception indeed.

*1:36 And Elisabeth your kinswoman, she who was called barren, has in her old age also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month of her pregnancy-* Elisabeth only announced her pregnancy at the end of five months. So this may have been a second encouragement to Mary, that non-standard pregnancies are no problem to God. Or perhaps it was the first Mary had heard of it. The lesson is that meetings with others, or news about them, are providentially brought into our lives in order to encourage us in situations which are about to come upon us.

*1:37 For no word from God shall be void of power-* The various possibilities in translation offer various possible interpretations. The idea could be that Mary was not to worry about the mechanics of how God's prophetic words about the virgin birth and the birth of the Messianic forerunner would come about; there was and is power within the prophetic word to bring about its own fulfilment. This principle has wide relevance. Not least, we need not worry how all shall be fulfilled in the last days, nor seek to force fulfilment of prophecy; for the power of fulfilment is lodged within the prophetic word itself. But "void of power" can also simply mean "impossible". The only other time the Greek word occurs is in Mt. 17:20: "If you have faith... nothing shall be impossible unto you". The 'possibility' of the fulfilment depends partially upon our faith. And this would have been so appropriate to Mary, who had prayed in faith to be the mother of Messiah. The prophetic word is "possible", but it is made actual by our faith. When Mary says "Be it unto me according to your word" (:38) she is as it were enabling the fulfilment of that word. See on :45. This is not to say that God does not have sovereign possibility of Himself; but clearly His preference is to work within the parameters of human faith.

1:38 *And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord! Be it unto me according to your word! And the angel departed from her-* Mary had probably said and later sung to the Lord Jesus: "Be it unto me according to your word". In Mt. 15:28 we have the Lord addressing the Canaanite woman: "Woman....be it unto you even as you wish". The Lord had called His mother "Woman..." in Cana. That woman restimulated memories of His dear mother. We see here a window into His humanity, using language in reflection of how His mother had spoken to Him in childhood; and we see too Mary's abiding influence upon Him.

Not only did Mary see herself as representative of Israel [see on :28]; she also felt a strong connection between herself and her Messiah Son. Any woman would feel this connection and identity with her child; but in Mary's case, her child was the Son of God, Messiah of Israel. And she had the spiritual ambition to see herself in some way, thereby, as Messiah. Consider the evidence:

- Lk. 1:38 "the handmaid of the Lord" uses the Greek female form for "servant of the Lord", a clear title of Messiah.
- She appropriates words spoken in the spirit of Christ to herself: "You have reduced the proud to lowliness like a wounded thing: and by your powerful arm you have scattered your enemies" (Ps. 89:10 cp. Lk. 1:51-53).
- She refers to herself in saying that God has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy; yet His Servant was Messiah, according to Isaiah's servant songs (Lk. 1:54,55).
- Lk. 1:28,42 "blessed among women" alludes to Jud. 5:24, as if Mary was already as Jael who had killed Sisera, an incident typical of the Lord's destruction of sin with the hammer of God's word. Mary is tied up with her son's victory- for He was part of her. There is a parallel between Mary and the "fruit of your womb", they were both to be blessed together (:42), as if God recognized this link between the mother and Son. The fact He 'allowed' this, rather than just using a cold 'channel' for His purpose, is simply surpassing in its wonder.
- Her words of Lk. 1:47 "my spirit shall rejoice in God" allude to Ps. 63:11: "But *the king* shall rejoice in God; every one that swears by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped". Mary parallels herself with "the King", seeing herself as connected with Messiah.
- "The servant of the Lord" would rejoice in God: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God" (Is. 61:10), and yet Mary as the female "servant of the Lord" also rejoices, sharing the joy of her Son.
- Lk. 1:48 has Mary rejoicing: "All generations shall call me blessed", alluding to how in Ps. 72:17 "all nations shall call *him* [Messiah] blessed". Mary is equated with her son, Messiah, and she recognized this. He was part of her.
- Mary understood that through her conception, God had put down the

mighty from their thrones and exalted *them* of low degree (Lk. 1:52). This clearly alludes to Ez. 21:26, where the princes are to be put down and *him* that is low is to be exalted, i.e. Messiah. But Mary felt that she had been exalted; thus she shared Messiah's exaltation because He was in her and she in Him. We too are in Him, and we should feel something of the pride and joy, along with the suffering, that comes from that identification. She parallels *her* low estate with *them* of low degree (Lk. 1:48,52)- perhaps referring to her and Jesus?

- She appropriated the promises to Abraham's seed [which according to Gal. 3:16 is one man, Jesus] to her personally (Lk. 1:55).

1:39- see on Lk. 2:19.

*And Mary arose in these days and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah-* One is hard pushed to find women-only scenes in contemporary literature written during Biblical times. The women are presented in terms of the men with whom they inter-relate. Yet Elizabeth and Mary are recorded as having a conversation with no male present (Lk. 1:39-45); and there are other such passages in Scripture (Gen. 19:32,34; 30:14,15; Ex. 2:1-10; Jud. 5:28-30; Ruth 1:6-2:2; 3:16-18; 4:14-17; 2 Kings 5:2,3). The narrative of the women at the tomb and the resurrection is another example (Lk. 23:55-24:4). In all these passages, the reader is invited to share the woman's perspective.

Mary took the nudge from the Angel, to find encouragement at this time in the company of another believer who was going through a broadly similar experience. She would presumably have left Joseph at this time; and we see again his willing sacrifice in still marrying her despite this. To the worldly eye, it would look for all the world as if she had got pregnant whilst away in Judah, or had run off there after falling pregnant in Nazareth. But she was prepared for all that misjudgement of her, wanting to follow the Lord's leading in finding spiritual strength from a believer going through the same things, whose faith had also been amazingly rewarded.

1:40 *And entered into the house of Zacharias and greeted Elisabeth-* The usual girly teenage thing would have been to go talk to her contemporaries about it. But not Mary. She went on probably the longest journey she had ever made, and probably alone, to see Elisabeth. She describes herself as the lowly, the hungry, who had been exalted and fed... whereas the proud and haughty had been disregarded. These words, and the evident allusions she makes back to Hannah's song, could be read as reflecting what had actually been wrought in Mary's own person and experience by some kind of persecution in her childhood. And it drove her within herself. It seems that she had been deeply humbled in order for her to be highly exalted. One wonders if she had been sexually abused. If Joseph was indeed much older than her, then we can understand how it happened that this girl, mature as she was beyond her

years, got attracted to an older and spiritual man. Her spirituality and intelligence [for her allusions to Scripture indicate a fine appreciation of so much] would have been enough to spark plenty of village jealousy. Jn. 2:11,12 speak of three groups- the disciples, who believed, the brothers of Jesus who didn't (Jn. 7:5), and Mary, whose level of faith isn't commented upon. She stands alone. Recognizing this tendency to isolationism within her, the Father seems to have encouraged Mary to open herself up to Elisabeth, encouraging her that her relative was in a somewhat similar position, having been barren for a lifetime and now expecting a child. Although Elisabeth was somewhat distant from Mary, Mary immediately goes to see her, following the prompting of the Lord. The record is styled to show the experiences of the two pregnancies as parallel:

- "The virgin's name was Mary" (1:27) = "her name was Elisabeth" (1:5).
- Both were startled at the Angelic appearances (1:12,29), and were comforted not to be afraid.
- "You will call his name John... you will call his name Jesus".
- "He will be great... he will be great".
- "How am I to know this?", and the Angel responded; "How shall this be?", and likewise the Angel responded.
- Both were given signs- the dumbness of Zacharias, and the pregnancy of Elisabeth.
- Both John and Jesus are described as growing up and becoming strong (Lk. 1:80; 2:40).

This is not the only time when we see circumstances repeating between Bible characters. The similarities were to direct them back to former and contemporary examples, to find strength. And this is one of the basic reasons for Christian fellowship amongst believers. Yet it would seem that as time went on, Mary became more introverted, she stored up "all these things" in her heart and couldn't share them with others. Whilst due to her unique path this is understandable, it may be related to the loss of spiritual perception and activity which it seems set in after she gave birth to Jesus.

1:41 *And it came to pass, when Elisabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the baby jumped within her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit-* The usual kicking within the womb [s.w. Gen. 25:22 LXX] was triggered by her being filled with the Spirit, just as the unborn child was filled with the Spirit within her womb (:15)- a good Biblical argument for the pro-life movement.

1:42- see on Lk. 1:28.

*And she lifted up her voice with a loud cry and said: Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*- Elisabeth is repeating the words and ideas of the Angel in :28. Mary would have

realized that the Angel was indeed from God, and the same Spirit was speaking through Elisabeth as through the Angel. We see the Father's gentle grace in providing her with confirmation after confirmation of the strange and lonely path she was being led along.

*1:43 But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*- Elisabeth found mutual encouragement from Mary, although Mary had gone to her for encouragement. This is the mutual nature of true Christian fellowship. Clearly Elisabeth perceived that her son was to be the Elijah prophet, and Mary's was to be Messiah whom her son would herald. There was however no jealousy at all, as at times happens between pregnant women who believe they are bearing significant offspring, but rather just a sense of gratitude for the grace of it all.

*1:44 For when the voice of your greeting came into my ears, the baby jumped in my womb for joy-* Elisabeth would have been greeted by Mary with the traditional "Shalom!", a wish of peace to her. And her sensitive mind perceived that that peace was the Messianic peace with God which would save Israel and the world.

*1:45 And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a fulfilment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord-* See on :53. Mary at this point was an inspiration to Paul in his trial (Lk. 1:45 = Acts 27:25). Mary was blessed for believing, because therefore and thereby there would be a fulfilment of the things spoken to her (Lk. 1:45 RV). Without her faith, would those things have been fulfilled? She had to do her bit. And this is why she was called blessed. She made possible the prophetic word; see on :37. The Lord basically told the disciples to go into the world and preach in order that the prophecies of repentance being preached among all nations would come true (Lk. 24:48). Paul's preaching to the whole world was likewise driven by a desire to fulfil the prophecy that Christ would be a light to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47).

In Jn. 20:29, Jesus unconsciously alludes to His mother's blessedness even after His glorification. Mary must have many times recounted the story of Elisabeth to Jesus, and His memory of it influenced His sentence construction even after His glorification. This gives a window into the extent to which we will be still who we are now in the Kingdom. Divine nature won't totally change who we are nor the influence of our parents upon us. This is a great encouragement to parents- who they influence their children to be, will be what they eternally will be. For Jesus alluded to the memory of His mother even in Divine nature.

*1:46 And Mary said: My soul does magnify the Lord-* See on :38 for the

allusions to Hannah's song. This is alluded to by Paul, when he uses the same Greek word in Phil. 1:2: "Christ shall be *magnified* in *my body / soul*". If this is a valid allusion, then "the Lord" is a reference to Jesus. In Lk. 1:43 Elisabeth had just described Jesus as "my Lord". And then Mary here parallels "the Lord" with "God my saviour / my Jesus". She understood how God was to be manifest in Jesus, as she parallels "my soul" with "my spirit" (:47). It's amazing that an illiterate teenager should have risen to such heights of understanding, probably without learning much at all from the local synagogue.

1:47 *And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour*- See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. This rang in Paul's mind (1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; Tit. 1:3). Mary's words "my spirit has rejoiced" are alluded to by Jesus unconsciously in Lk. 10:21 [the only time the Greek phrase "spirit... rejoices" is used]. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit" and thanked God that the humble not the wise had been chosen- showing exactly the spirit of Mary's words of Lk. 1:52,53, the words she had probably sung to Him around the house as a child. Unconsciously [?], the Lord Jesus was alluding to Mary His mother's attitude. Such was the Jesus-Mary relationship. Luke brings this out in his record in the connections he makes. Mary had an influence even on the Son of God- quite some encouragement to all parents and those who spend time with children as to the influence they have.

1:48 *Because He has looked upon the low estate of His handmaid*- See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. Mary's quotations and allusions to the OT are nearly all from the LXX, and it is almost certain that she would have been familiar with some of the Apocryphal books bound up with the LXX at that time. Consider the words of 4 Ezra 9:45, where Zion speaks as a barren woman: "God heard your handmaid and regarded my low estate, and considered my distress and gave me a son". Clearly she saw herself as the representative of Zion. Moses told Israel that God "has done great things in you" [in her womb?] (Dt. 10:21). She felt that God had helped her as "His servant Israel"- alluding to Ps. 98:3 LXX "He has remembered His mercy to Jacob". Unto *us*, Israel, a son was to be given (Is. 9:6 cp. Lk. 2:11), but it was actually given to Mary. See on Lk. 1:28.

God recognized her "low estate" [humility] and exalted her above all women, just as He would His Son among men. He did not choose some well heeled Jerusalem girl, but a poor, barefoot teenager in despised Nazareth. The same Greek word is used in Acts 8:33: "In his humiliation [low estate] his judgment was taken away". It occurs too in Phil. 2:8: "He *humbled himself*". In the cross, indeed throughout the seven stage self-humiliation of the Lord which Phil. 2 speaks of, He was living out the spirit of His mother. She taught Him the life and the way of the cross.

Hence the way she insisted on being there at the end, and the comfort she would have given Him, and the love He showed by asking for the only one who really understood Him to be taken away, for her sake as well as His own. The Lord directly alluded to His mother's pattern of humiliation and exaltation by using the same word again in Mt. 23:12: "Whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself [s.w. be abased- we must either humble ourselves or be humbled, it's such a powerful logic] shall be exalted". Thus the Lord Jesus alludes to His mother's words in order to set her up as our pattern ["whosoever"]. And yet He Himself showed the ultimate obedience to her pattern in the death of the cross. For this and many other reasons, the Lord's mind was upon His mother in His time of dying. And according to the Messianic Psalms, He even asks God to have mercy upon Him *for Mary's sake* (Ps. 86:16; 116:16).

*For from this time forward all generations shall call me blessed-* When Mary spoke of all generations calling her blessed, her mind was in Gen. 30:13: "The daughters [i.e. future generations of them] shall call me blessed", and yet at the same time on Zilpah the servant maid [cp. Mary the handmaiden] bearing Asher [happy]. These women were seen by Mary as representatives of herself. She was so humble to compare herself with the servant girl. Yet she also had in mind Prov. 31:28, where the virtuous woman is blessed by all. She saw herself as the virtuous woman who excelled all- yet she was so humble. She was the most highly favoured woman, but was so humble. It's hard to know your true value without being proud about it. It seems to me that we must learn to value ourselves far more, to love our neighbour *as we do really love / respect ourselves*, without being proud. The ability to see your own worth and value in God's purpose is crucial; we tend to be either proud, or too negative about ourselves. Mary was so spiritually ambitious to want to be the mother of Messiah, understanding He would be God manifest. Mary realized that her great honour was being given in response to her humility- God had regarded her "low estate", her humility. She was humble enough to know God had noticed her humility- and still not be proud about it. She had enough self-knowledge to perceive this. It's as if she is saying 'Thank you for taking note of my humility'. This is really a deep essay in humility- to recognize she was humble without being proud about it. And to be able to say it sincerely. Mary's humility was programmatic for Jesus on the cross; for there He humbled Himself that He might be exalted. This was the theme that, according to Phil. 2, was ever in His mind.

Later Scripture seems to allude to Mary's words of praise in Lk. 1 and set her up as a representative of us all. She speaks in Lk. 1:49 of her "low estate", alluding to Ps. 136:23, which describes us all in this way.

1:49 *For He that is mighty has done to me great things, and holy is His name-* The Magnificat shows that Mary had a fair appreciation of God's Names, in that she refers to Him as "He that is mighty", interpreting for us the Old Testament idea of El Shaddai, the God of fruitfulness [Heb. *shad* = 'breast']. Note how neither Mary nor the NT writers transfer the OT Hebrew titles of God, e.g. 'Yahweh', rather they interpret them. She sees her conception of the Son of God as an example of how "holy is His Name" (Lk. 1:49). The Lord Himself understood that "Hallowed be Your Name" is to be paralleled with the Father's will being done. The Name of God speaks of His actions; because He is who He is, He will articulate this in how He acts. This is why all His actions are understandable and broadly predictable in terms of the basic characteristics that comprise His Name. The Name is not just a word, a lexical item. And Mary perceived all this- that the Holy Name of Jehovah was to be manifested ultimately and supremely in the Son she would bear. For this is the climax of God manifestation. Because "Holy is His Name", she would bear a "holy thing" that manifested that Name. There is in Hebrew an 'intensive plural', whereby the plural form is used to reflect the greatness of a singular thing. Thus 'Jehovah Elohim', Jehovah who will be mighty ones, can be read as a specific prophecy of His definitive revelation in the 'mighty one' of His Son. And could it be that Mary grasped all this? I for one think she did.

1:50 *And His mercy is to generations and generations on them that fear Him-* The subsequent generations who would bless her would do so because through her Son, "mercy" was experienced. She perceived that Messiah would bring mercy to sinners, indeed to all; rather than just the re-establishment of Israel's political Kingdom.

1:51 *He has shown strength with His arm, He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart-* See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. Through the Lord, God "scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts" (Lk. 1:51). This is quoting from Gen. 6:5 LXX concerning the wicked imagination of man's heart at the flood. This is even more evidence that we can read the events of the flood as typical of two things; our salvation from the judgment upon sin, and also of the events of the last days, when that salvation will be physically manifested. We are in Noah's position; we can see clearly the judgments which must come upon sin.

Such a Bible minded woman inevitably had faith. For faith comes by hearing the word of God. Mary believed the Angel's words fully- hence her rejoicing. The aorist tenses of Lk. 1:51-53 seem the equivalent of prophetic perfect tenses in Hebrew- Mary firmly believes that what is still future is as good as happened. She had the faith that considers what has been promised to have actually happened. At that moment it was as if

God *had* scattered the proud, the rulers and the princes- even though this would only be achieved by the Lord's life, death and glorification (Acts 2:33; 4:24-27; 5:31).

1:52 *He has put down princes from their thrones and has exalted them of low station in life-* See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. Despite all the undoubted spiritual perception in the Magnificat, she didn't have totally pure understanding. It seems from her allusion here to Ez. 21:26 [the mighty being put down from their thrones and the humble one exalted] that she thought that Ezekiel's prophesy about Messiah's restoration of the Kingdom had already been fulfilled in her conception of Jesus. It could be that she was so sure that her child would one day do this that she saw the time of the coming of "Him whose right it is" as being right there and then; and yet we know that it is in fact still future. Likewise "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" *may* imply [although not necessarily] that she hadn't grasped the implications that Messiah must be the result of a virgin birth, as per Is. 7:14. Yet for all this, she still had acceptability before God, and the required spiritual ambition to be Messiah's mother.

Mary perceived the importance of humility. Her song of rejoicing is a consciously arranged poem by her. It is in two strophes, each climaxing with the themes of lowliness / exaltation. She saw humility as the true exaltation, and the structure of her little song reflects this. She perhaps prepared the song in her mind as she walked down from Nazareth to the Judean hills to meet Elisabeth; there is a rhyme established by the last words of the four lines in Lk. 1:52,53: *thronon* with *agathon*, and *tapeinous* with *kenous*. In all this she reached a new paradigm for humility was a concept foreign to the first century mind. Strength, wealth and ability were to be demonstrated; to show strength by being humble was just unheard of. Only those who were forced into humble submission by the stronger were 'humble'. To clean the toilets when nobody else notices, and the host of other such opportunities for service in ecclesial life... this is the true humility, the real strength and exaltation before God.

1:53 *The hungry He has filled with good things and the rich He has sent away empty-* See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. Not only was the Lord Himself influenced by His mother. Paul and Peter allude to Mary and her words in their writings. The hymn to Jesus which Paul wrote in Phil. 2 is full of themes taken from Mary's song- the same themes of God's manifestation in His Son, humiliation and exaltation, occur there. There are several connections between the accounts of the early preaching of the Gospel in Acts, and Mary's song of praise. Her words came to influence the brethren who stood up there and preached. Perhaps

Mary, who was meeting with them (Acts 1:14), sung the words to them and they all memorized it. Raymond Brown claims there are 18 words or items shared by the preaching of Peter (Acts 3:12-26) and the Magnificat [Mary's song of praise] (*The Birth Of The Messiah*, New York: Doubleday, 1993 p. 354). Mary had quoted Ps. 107:9 about how she had been filled with good things; but Zacharias quoted the next verse, Ps. 107:10, shortly afterwards (Lk. 1:79). Surely Mary had gotten him thinking in the same paths as she did. And she should likewise influence us.

Mary felt that through her being granted the honour of bearing Jesus, the hungry had been filled. The Lord in Lk. 6:21 alludes to all this. He speaks of how blessed [=Mary] are the hungry who will be filled, using the same three words as in Lk. 1- *blessed* was Mary, the *hungry*, who was *filled* in her stomach. He states that there is a blessedness upon all of us who believe (Jn. 20:29)- just as His mother was proclaimed blessed for her belief (Lk. 1:45). Mary had felt that God had "Filled the hungry [i.e. their stomach, cp. the womb of Mary] with the good thing [Gk.]"- Jesus (Lk. 1:53). He calls Himself this good thing, using the very same Greek word in Mt. 20:15: "I am the good one"; Jn. 1:46; 7:12 [where the "good thing" is Messiah]. Her perception of Him became His. And so with us; if we perceive our children as future brethren, so, hopefully and prayerfully, they will be. Jesus could have sinned; He could have failed. But Mary right from His babyhood believed that He wouldn't. She believed in Him and in His successful completion of His destiny from when she first conceived Him. And surely this is a pattern for Christian mothers too.

1:54 *He has given help to Israel His servant, that He might remember mercy-* See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. As noted on :28, she saw herself as the "Servant" Israel. "Mercy" is a real theme with her; she saw Messiah as enabling mercy for multiple generations (see on :50). The fulfilment of the prophecies in Messiah she saw as a mercy, a grace, even though it was her faith which enabled them to work out as they did. "Given help" is literally to take hold of, and she is alluding to Is. 41:8,9 LXX, where God helps or takes by the hand His servant Israel; but this was only going to be possible through Messiah, her son, because she realized that Israel of themselves had refused Yahweh's outstretched arm towards them. She was very far from the nationalism which was tied up with Messianic expectation at the time. She saw Messiah as the channel for the grace and mercy upon Israel which their sinfulness required.

1:55 *(As He spoke to our fathers) toward Abraham and his seed for ever-* See on :38 for the allusions to Hannah's song. She speaks in Lk. 1:55 Gk. of "*the seed of him*"- she understood the seed of Abraham to be Messiah, her son, and makes many references and

allusions to the promises to Abraham. She had clearly reflected upon the way that the things of the Gospel were all promised to Abraham (Gal. 3:8).

1:56 *And Mary stayed with her about three months and then returned home-* As noted earlier, she took lessons from Elisabeth's example. She too therefore hid herself during the early part of her pregnancy. She must have returned home just before Elisabeth gave birth (cp. :36), seeking to avoid the public eye by being present at the birth of John. It was presumably at her return that she was "found with child" (Mt. 1:18), as the end of the first trimester of pregnancy would have given her certain evidence that she was really pregnant.

1:57 *Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son-* "The time came" alludes to how the prophetic words "shall be fulfilled in their time" (:20).

1:58 *And her neighbours and her kinsfolk heard that the Lord had magnified His mercy towards her; and they rejoiced with her-* The idea of magnifying mercy is that we live by God's mercy, but in this open answer to prayer, that mercy was magnified, made the more visible before all. We can logically deduce from this that God's mercy is there even when prayer is apparently not answered; it is just that answered prayer magnifies that pre-existing and ever present mercy. We note the emphasis upon Elizabeth here- the time came for *her* to give birth, and the neighbours heard of God's mercy towards *her*, and they rejoiced *with her*. This is typical of Luke's inspired emphasis upon the importance of women; a secular account of those times would have focused upon how the famous priest Zacharias was now having a son etc. To claim the Bible is somehow against women is facile; it was far ahead of its time in being careful to honour both genders.

1:59 *And it came to pass on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child, and they would have called him Zacharias, after the name of the father-* 'John' means 'Yahweh's grace / favour'; "Zacharias" means 'Yahweh has remembered'. God did indeed remember the prayers of Zacharias; and 'remembering' when used about God is a Hebrew idiom used about God answering prayer. But Zacharias had not lived up to his name. Instead the prayer was heard by grace, and righteousness was imputed to Zacharias, as noted on :6. It was therefore appropriate that there should be a break with tradition, and the child named 'John' rather than 'Zacharias'.

1:60 *But his mother answered and said: No, he shall be called John-* One of Luke's themes is the equality and dignity of women before God. For a woman to stand up against her male relatives and take the decision about

the naming of a child, in defiance of tradition whereby a male firstborn child must have the name of his father, was quite something. Mary took encouragement from this by naming her child 'Jesus' rather than some form of 'Joseph'.

*1:61 And they said to her: There are none of your kindred that are called by this name-* This break with tradition was to reflect how God was beginning a new creation, in which family ties and names were of no significance. This was radical stuff for a kinship oriented society. We too, in our own times and over our contemporary issues, are asked to radically step out from societal expectations.

*1:62 And they made signs to his father, what he wanted him called-* The family, as noted on :60, were shocked that a woman could assert such dominance in this matter of naming the child. They refused to let her get away with it without at least some semblance of male agreement.

*1:63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, saying: His name is John. And they all marvelled-* Perhaps he had used the same tablet in explaining to his wife what had happened in the temple, and the need to name the child 'John'.

*1:64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed and he spoke, blessing God-* This recalls the opening of Ezekiel's mouth so that he too could speak prophetic words. The context was similar- of a sinful Judah facing judgment unless they urgently repented and accepted God's prophetic word. The idea of the tongue being loosed is another example of wrong medical ideas being used to express healing; and the same is done with the idea of demons. The immediacy of healing demonstrated that the naming of the child was hard for Zacharias, who would have been tempted to want his own name continued in his only son. But he overcame that struggle in faith and obedience to the Father's revealed word.

*1:65 And fear came on all their neighbours. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea-* We might rather have expected 'joy'. But their secular joy turned to fear when they realized how close God was in all these things. And this in essence is why people struggle to believe the good news of the Gospel. The intellectual search is one thing, but coming face to face with 'John', Yahweh's grace, is quite another. And it is at that point that many turn away.

1:66 *And all that heard them laid them up in their heart, saying: What then shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him-* Mary and Elisabeth are likewise described by Luke as laying these things up in their hearts. There was clearly a psychological expectation amongst the people that John was going to be significant. Somehow they perceived that God's hand was with the child and was going to use him; they were being prepared to be potentially open to the message he would preach. The "hand of the Lord" being "with" people is the language of the exodus (Dt. 6:21; 7:8; 9:26 and often). There was a sense that deliverance from bondage was at hand through this man's ministry. But of course they failed to perceive that the bondage in view was to sin rather than to Rome; and the freedom was not immediate political freedom, but the priceless gift of freedom from sin and death.

1:67 *And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying-* Just as Ezekiel's dumbness was ended by "the hand of the Lord" (Ez. 33:22) and he was able to immediately prophesy; it was the same hand of the Lord that was operating here (:66).

1:68 *Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people-* Zacharias' song of praise was largely about the salvation to be achieved in the Lord Jesus, whom his son John was to herald. Zacharias therefore assumed that the work of John was going to be ultimately successful and thereby enable the Lord Jesus to appear and bring salvation. "He has visited His people" is a quotation from Ruth 1:6. The same miraculous creation of a family that happened to Ruth and the elderly Boaz was happening to the family of Zacharias. Zacharias understood the Divine visitation of Israel to be through the dawning of the Messianic sun of righteousness (:78; 7:16). He doesn't glory in his own son, but rather in Mary's son. This is an essay in how Christ-centeredness will displace our natural tendency to be self-centred. Mary would have taken great encouragement from this song; she would have recognized it was a Divinely inspired (:67) statement that John's birth guaranteed the birth of her son. The stress of the journey to Bethlehem, the lack of accommodation there etc. would have all been assuaged by meditating upon these Divine statements that the birth of John guaranteed, as it were, that of her son.

1:69 *And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David-* This again is a reference to the Lord Jesus and not to John; for John was a Levite whereas the Lord was from Judah via David. Zacharias was focused not upon his own son and his natural joy, but upon the far greater spiritual things portended by it. We need to likewise not focus solely upon our own immediate family experiences but to see the far greater picture in the perspective of the Lord Jesus. The horn of David

was Yahweh's anointed or Christ, which would sprout fruit (Ps. 132:17). For David, Yahweh was the horn of his salvation (2 Sam. 22:3); the idea is that this Divine salvation would appear as a horn arising within the family of David. This is the kind of human and Divine fusion which was implied in the great promises to David about his seed; this seed would be God's son and also David's son. The only way that could be achieved was through the virgin birth. Zacharias would have reflected on these things, recalling that Mary was in the line of David. His own son John is not in view at all, for he was a Levite. The focus of Zacharias was so completely upon the Lord Jesus, Mary's son, rather than his own son. And he seems to have passed on to his son John this focus upon the Christ.

1:70 (*As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets that have been since the world began*)- The promised Messianic seed was the message of all the prophets, and Luke concludes his Gospel with the Lord explaining these things from all the prophets to the two on the way to Emmaus. This is one of many points of contact between the opening and closing of the Gospel. The beginning of the world was seen as the time when the prophets began, presumably referring to Adam. The world and its beginning as presented in the Bible began then. All angst about the ultimate origins of the earth, previous creations, the process of creation etc. is all misplaced. We are asked to see the time when God's prophetic word began to be spoken as the beginning of the world.

The words could also be read as meaning that all the prophets somehow pre-existed at the beginning. This language of pre-existence is therefore not to be read literally, but in terms of them being within the Father's prophetic plan from the beginning. And this empowers us to better understand the language of the Lord's 'pre-existence'- not literally, but within the purpose of God.

1:71 *Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us*- See on Lk. 7:19. Clearly he understood Messiah as the One who would bring immediate relief from the Roman occupation. He'd misread, as many Jews do today, the Old Testament prophecies and types which involve two comings of Messiah, and the need for Him to firstly die the death of rejection. But all the same, we find no hint of condemnation, but rather of commendation, for this Godly man.

1:72 *To show mercy towards our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant*- This cannot mean that mercy was now given to the fathers, but that the fulfilment of the promised mercy to them had now come. This is why "mercy and truth" is a phrase used about the fulfilment of the promises to the fathers- the promised mercy had in truth been fulfilled, now in the utter "truth" which was and is Jesus Christ (Gen. 24:27; Ps. 98:3 and often in the Psalms; Is. 16:5; Mic. 7:20). The fulfilment of the

promises was in the Christ and not in John the Baptist; but the focus of Zacharias is totally upon the Lord whom his son would testify to.

1:73 *The oath which He spoke to Abraham our father-* The path to Abraham was understood as "mercy" (:72). Peter likewise interprets the promises to Abraham as being ultimately about the turning away of his seed from sin, and personal salvation (Acts 3:25,26).

1:74 *To grant to us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear-* The promises were "to us". "Salvation is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22) in the sense that the promises concerning salvation were made only to Abraham and his seed. We can only have those promises made to us if we become *in* the seed, by being baptised *into* Christ (Gal. 3:22-29). Then, all that is true of the Lord Jesus becomes true of us. Thus Zacharias quoted prophecies about the seed of Abraham and David as applying to all believers (Lk. 1:69,73,74). As noted on :72 and :73, the essential salvation promised in Christ was of mercy towards our sins. These are our enemies, from which we are to be delivered in Christ; we can serve Him now "without fear"- the fear of ultimate failure, of condemnation. The same word is used in 1 Jn. 4:18 of how we can now live without fear, secure in his love and salvation by grace. This is the good news of the Gospel. The idea of serving *without* fear is in conscious contrast to the repeated Old Testament commands for those under the law to serve God *with* fear (Dt. 6:13; 10:20; Josh. 24:14; Ps. 2:11 and often). It would have been a strange, novel and challenging idea; and yet it was in fact implicit in the promises to Abraham. This is the good news.

1:75 *In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days-* We read in :6 that Zacharias and Elisabeth "were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless". But that holiness is now possible for all Israel, not just the Levites and dedicated religionists like that pious couple. And this holy walk in daily life and thought is motivated by the fact we are freed from fear of condemnation, the fear of ultimate spiritual failure; for we are saved by grace. This is a far stronger motivation than striving for obedience to any legal code, in the hope that we shall somehow one day be possibly saved by our obedience.

1:76 *Yes, and you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High-* We can imagine Zacharias now turning his eyes to his own newborn child. If he had received no more information than what is recorded, then he had done well to perceive that this child was the Elijah prophet, and therefore Mary's child was to be Messiah.

*For you shall go before the presence of the Lord to make ready His ways-* John the Baptist was to "prepare" the way for the Lord's coming- evidently a process- in reflection of how God had been working a long time to "prepare" [same Greek word] the way for His Son's coming (Lk. 1:76; Lk. 2:31; Lk. 3:4). We likewise, in our preaching work in these last days, are working in tandem and in step with God. The idea of God 'preparing' implies that there is therefore a gap between the plan being made, and it being executed- hence "The Lord has both planned and done what He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 51:12; Jer. 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; Is. 37:26; Zech. 1:6; Zech. 8:14). See on Mt. 20:23.

*1:77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people in the remission of their sins-* See on Mt. 3:11. The experience of forgiveness is a foretaste of salvation; as John's gospel puts it, we have eternal life now. Not in that we shall not die, but in so far as we live in the experience of sin forgiven, without fear of condemnation should the Lord return right now... for this is "salvation", the present experience of the great salvation to be brought to us at the Lord's second coming. And we can share this knowledge of salvation with others; Paul alludes to these words, showing that he was to bring others to the light just as John had (Lk. 1:77,79 = Acts 13:47; 26:18,23). Luke is the only evangelist to continue the quotation of Is. 40 to include the words "all mankind will see God's salvation". And he focuses especially upon the wonder of forgiveness (Lk. 1:77; 7:48; Acts 13:38). Only he records the parable of the prodigal (Lk. 15:11-32), and only he describes the great preaching commission as relating to "repentance and remission of sins" (Lk. 24:47).

The principles God will use in the final judgment are manifested now, and have been reflected in His previous judgments of men. In our very personal lives, there are foretastes of that future judgment. When we receive forgiveness we experience the essence of the future salvation (Lk. 1:77). Indeed, whenever man meets with God, whenever His ways have contact with those of men (which so often happens in the life of the believer) there is a judgment experience; His holiness, His demands, the imperatives which lay within His very being, reveal quite naturally our failures. The Hebrew word used to describe God's 'meeting' with men is also used in the senses of 'summoning' or gathering to a trial (Ex. 30:6). And positively, the *degree to which* we have responded to Him will be revealed by our meeting with Him.

*1:78 Because of the tender mercy of our God-* The fact that God has a "heart of mercy"- a lovely phrase- is His glory. It leads Him to glory in

overlooking sin. And on this basis John appealed to people to repent and claim that forgiveness, thus allowing God to glory. In the light of all this, one wonders in what tone of voice John spoke. The cold printed words in our Bibles can lead us to imagine him speaking in a gruff, austere manner.

*When the sunrise shall dawn upon us-* "The sunrising (AVmg.) from on high hath visited us" through the Lord's mission, fulfilling the prophecy of Mal. 4:2 about Him as the sun of righteousness in the first century, although it clearly has reference also to the greater dawning yet to come.

Many of the incidents in the first coming of the Lord Jesus are intended to point us forward to events which will happen at the his second coming. There is clear indication in the records of Luke 1 and 2 that there were a faithful remnant in Jerusalem at the time of our Lord's birth, whose attitude points forward to that of the latter-day remnant at the time of His second coming. Whilst only Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna are mentioned, we can be sure that there were others in this group - Anna "spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38); "many" rejoiced even at the birth of John, on the understanding that he was Christ's forerunner (Luke 1:14). It is possible that the shepherds, too, were in this group, which would confirm the impression that the 'remnant' were in the lower ranks of society - Zacharias a superannuated priest, Anna a servant of the temple (Luke 2:37) - the equivalent of a modern office cleaner. This connects with the 'remnant' left in the land by Nebuchadnezzar being the poorest of the poor (2 Kings 24:15 cp. 25:11,12), and suggests a working-class Jewish 'remnant' in the last days.

There is much language used concerning the birth of Jesus which is easily applicable to His second coming. This in itself encourages us to see the record of those awaiting His first coming as typical of the last days. The birth of John and Jesus is described as God 'visiting and redeeming his people' (Luke 1:68); what better way of describing God's latter-day intervention? "The sunrising from on high hath visited us" (Luke 1:78 A.V. mg.) was Zacharias' comment upon God's purpose in John and Jesus, making an unmistakeable allusion to Mal. 4:2 concerning Christ's second coming being like the rising sun. Note how this sun rising is upon the righteous remnant of the last days (Mal. 4:12) - identifying Zacharias with them. The Angels rejoiced that through Christ's birth there was "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14), although this will only be fully done in the Kingdom. Simeon spoke of the baby Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:32), although this will only be fully true after the second coming (Is. 42:6; 49:6). The remnant "looked for redemption (to

appear) in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38); they could only have figured this out from realizing that the Old Testament 'kingdom' prophecies concerning Jerusalem, which we normally associate with the second coming, had a primary fulfilment in the birth of Christ.

John the Baptist commented that he preached repentance and baptized in Israel, *so that* the Messiah might be manifest to Israel (Jn. 1:31). His work was a pattern for the Elijah ministry of the last days. It could be argued that Messiah was only manifest in the first century because of the success of John's work- for large numbers were baptized of him. Could it be that the timing of the final revelation of Messiah likewise depends upon the success of the Elijah ministry in leading Israel to repentance? And what implications are there in this, if actually we are the voice of that ministry...

We can now scan the record for more detailed latter-day typology:-

- The remnant were in or around Jerusalem - as it seems the latter-day faithful will also be. They looked for Messiah to appear in Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). If latter-day Jewry are persecuted to the extent that the only Jews left alive in the land are in Jerusalem (see previous studies, especially Chapter 8), then they, too, will expect Messiah to come to them in that same city. Note that the woman whose intense pleadings represent the prayers of the latter day remnant (Lk.18:2-8) "was in a city" - Jerusalem?
- They eagerly looked for the Lord's birth as a fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises, that through his seed "we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve (God) without fear" (Luke 1:74). Likewise the latter-day remnant will meditate how the Abrahamic promises concerning freedom from their (Arab) enemies are so relevant to them - perhaps due to the Elijah ministry turning their hearts to the Jewish "fathers", a phrase often used about the patriarchs who received the promises (Mal. 4:6).
- Israel in the first century were under the domination of Rome, the fourth beast of Dan. 7:23. In the latter-day application of this, necessitated by the image upon which the beasts are based standing complete in the last days, the fourth beast with its horns corresponds to the Arab coalition which will then dominate Israel.
- Some of the remnant had the Spirit gift of prophecy (Luke 1:41,67; 2:26,36). The latter-day remnant may also experience this - their old men (cp. Zacharias and Simeon) and young people (cp. Mary), may have the gift of prophecy around the time of the Lord's return - "before the great and terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:28-31).
- The shepherds watching at night while the Lord was born (Luke 2:8) echoes the Passover. There is good reason to think that the second coming may be associated with Passover time. The vision of Angels which they saw may correspond to the remnant in Jerusalem seeing a literal "sign of the (coming of the) son of man in (literal) heaven" (Matt. 24:30), composed of the Angel-cherubim. This "sign of the son of man

in heaven" must be alluding back to the literal portent which the shepherds saw in the sky, pointing to the Lord's first coming. Thus there will be no need to say "See here; or see there", because the Lord's return will be so evidently public (Lk. 17:23).

- Zacharias and Elisabeth "were both righteous before God" (Luke 1:6) amidst a corrupt Jewish world that refused to prepare itself for God's manifestation in Christ, despite the availability to them of God's Word, which clearly prophesied it. This recalls the description of Noah as being "righteous before God" (Gen. 7:1) in the context of the flood coming upon the world. We have earlier shown this to be full of reference to the last days.
- There is a triple emphasis on Israel praying to God in the lead up to Christ's birth (Luke 1:10,13; 2:37). We know from Joel 2:17 and many other passages that the remnant will likewise devote themselves to prayer in the last days, as will spiritual Israel.
- The appearance of Angels before Christ's birth (Luke 1:12,26) is similar to their visiting Israel under persecution during the times of the Judges, bringing the news of deliverance from their Arab enemies through a 'saviour' ('Jesus').
- The conception of John (the Elijah prophet of the first century) preceded that of Christ - he was Christ's forerunner - there is therefore a necessity for this type to be fulfilled in the literal coming of the latter-day Elijah as a prelude to Christ's manifestation to Israel.
- The "joy and gladness" (Luke 1:14) of the remnant at Christ's birth will be but a dim foretaste of the ecstasy which the embattled remnant of the last days will experience at their Lord's return.

*1:79 To shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace-* Without Messiah, Israel under the law were in darkness and under the shadow of death. This would have been hard for proud Judaism to swallow. The allusion is clearly to the Messianic prophecy of Is. 9:2, but sitting in "the shadow of death" means to live in the prospect of imminent death. And that is in fact where all humanity are situated- if only they would perceive it. For we are all terminally ill, on borrowed time, with an urgency to get out from under that shadow. The result of the Messianic sun would be to guide feet into the way of peace with God, living before Him without fear of death and condemnation because they are assured of their salvation in Him (see on :74,77). It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps into that way of peace; it is the Lord's work to guide human feet into that way. That guidance is by His Spirit, by grace.

*1:80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the desert until the day he appeared publicly to Israel-* The reference to "spirit" could be to the work of the Spirit, active in the formation of his character from his mother's womb (:15). God's Spirit and John's spirit are clearly connected here; and this is how the Holy Spirit works in our spirit /

lives too, through a collaboration, a conspiracy of the willing. Presumably at some point in his youth, John left his parents, or perhaps they died, and went to live "in the desert". He may have encountered the Essenes there, or even lived with them, for there are undoubted points of contact and allusion between his teaching and theirs.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *Now it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered-* Clearly the term "all the world" doesn't refer to the globe. Many errors of exposition have arisen from failing to perceive that such global language is not to be taken literally, but is relative to the context in which it is used. Perhaps we are to see in the Lord's birth the reckoning of all the world.

2:2 *This census first took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria-* Maybe Mary grasped the relevance of Ps. 87:6 LXX to the fact she gave birth to Messiah during a census: "In the census of the peoples, this one [Messiah] will be born there". The relevance of this verse to the Lord's birth may explain why Luke says that the census of Quirinius was part of a census of the whole world, which wasn't strictly true. But as all historians do, he presents the facts within the framework of his wider intentions and themes.

2:3 *And all went to register themselves, everyone to his own city-* As noted on :1, we have global language used here, within the framework of the general thematic impression which the inspired historian wishes to give (see on :2). Not "everyone" in the Roman empire, let alone a poor backwater like Palestine, would have gone to their birth place to be registered. It is also unclear why everyone had to physically go to their birth place for registration. Surely the tax registration census was of people where they were then living and working. Old people and children were surely not required to journey to their birth place just to be counted. But the impression is given that everyone went to their birth place, and then the Lord was born. There is no such thing as pure, factual history. Every record of events reflects the agenda of the historian; and this is true of the inspired historian Luke. The idea is that everyone has a birth place; and so did the Lord Jesus. His humanity is thereby emphasized.

2:4 *And Joseph also went from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and family of David)-* As noted on :3, it is unlikely that everyone literally went to their birth place for this tax registration. Perhaps Joseph had enough income to require this; although there is every indication of poverty in the family. Perhaps he wished to be carefully obedient to every human law as far as he could; and this meant that Mary went with him and therefore gave birth in Bethlehem, David's city.

2:5 *To enroll himself with Mary, who was engaged to him, being great with child-* It could be that this is recorded as a fulfilment of how Is. 53:12 had predicted that Jesus would be "numbered with the

transgressors". He was numbered amongst humanity, and was born where both Mary and Joseph were, in Bethlehem. "With Mary" could suggest that she too had been born there; otherwise we are left to assume that only the males had to register, and so Mary tagged along with him. If indeed Mary had also been born in Bethlehem, as is here implied, then this would reinforce the idea that the Lord was truly David's seed, and should have been the legitimate king of Israel by descent.

*2:6 And it came to pass, while they were there, the time came that she should give birth-* "While they were there" heightens the connection with the fact the Lord was born in Bethlehem, the birth place of His mother and adoptive father (see on :5). The time which came was that precise moment so carefully prepared and calculated by the Father; Gal. 4:4 surely alludes here in saying that "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman".

*2:7 And she brought forth her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn-* Jer. 14:8 was addressed to the Lord and Saviour of Israel, Jesus-Messiah: "Why are you like an alien in the land, like a traveller who stays in lodgings?". If Mary had made all these connections, the hurt of being told there was no room in the lodging, and having to give birth in a stable, laying her dear child in a cattle manger... would have been far less felt by her. These things would have thrilled and rejoiced her heart rather than hurt her, just as we can joyfully perceive how present sufferings are working out so analogous to a Biblical verse or character.

The whimpering, vulnerable *Son of God* was laid down in a cattle stall (Luke, the doctor who appreciated the need for hygiene, so emphasizes this: Lk. 2:7,12,16), because the other guests in that cheap hotel couldn't make space for a heavily pregnant woman (again, Luke the doctor would've sensed the shame of it). "No room for them in the inn" can also be translated "The inn was not the place for them" (Lucien Deiss, *Joseph, Mary, Jesus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996) p. 28). It had to be this way- the way of rejection, of poverty. God's children ultimately know no other way in this world. Did Mary see the link between her giving birth in a stable and laying Jesus down in a "manger" (Gk. *phatne*), perhaps with oxen and donkeys onlooking, and Is. 1:3 LXX: "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey knows the *phatne* ("manger") of its Lord (*kyrios* as in Lk. 2:11), but Israel has not known me".

The serene paintings of the scene do no justice to it. The whole setting would have been dirty, noisy and inappropriate for a birth place. The Lord was born into rejection, poverty and desperation; with Mary in a strange place, far from home and her relatives, having her first child so humanly alone. And the Father continues His same style of working to this day, through the things which man despises.

*2:8 And there were shepherds in the same region staying in the field and keeping watch at night over their flock-* It has been observed that the choice to reveal the good news of Christ to the shepherds first of all was surprising; for these too were the poorest of the poor, deprived [along with tax collectors] of Jewish rights. They belonged to the "most despised" of all social groups. See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem In The Time Of Jesus* (London: S.C.M., 1969) p. 304; Richard Horsley, *The Liberation Of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives In Social Context* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) pp. 102-106.

The fact they were in the fields with their flocks shows clearly enough that the Lord's birth was not in December- for then the flocks would have been kept under cover and not in the fields.

*2:9 And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were terrified-* As noted on :8, shepherds were at the bottom of the social ladder; and there is a purposeful juxtaposition between them and the glory of God which shone about them. The picture is of them identified with the Angel which stood with them, so that the impression was given to an observer of a halo of glory shining about the despised shepherds. God's glory was identified with weak men, at the very bottom end of the social ladder; just as His Son was born in a stable amongst animals, and laid in a manger- the birth style of the lowest of the low.

*2:10 And the angel said to them: Be not afraid. For I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people-* Their fear was because of their own sense of unworthiness in the presence of the Lord's glory. But Luke has already begun the theme that the grace to be revealed in the Lord Jesus takes away our fear and sense of unworthiness (see on 1:74,77). And it continues with this assurance to the shepherds, that the good tidings of the Gospel are that "all people" [implying the Gentiles too] could serve God without fear. It is this which is the greatest joy, and which is good news indeed; that we need not fear God's condemnation because we are identified with His Son. Anything less than this would make the "Gospel" not so much good news, but rather just a worrying and burdensome weight of responsibility before God.

*2:11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord-* They were not to "fear" (:10), because a Saviour had been born. The salvation in view was therefore from sin and the fear which arises from it. This was a great theme in the song of Zacharias (see on 1:74,77). Salvation from the Romans was what everyone wanted, but the spiritual reality was far greater. "Christ the Lord" is an unusual phrase; the idea is that because of this great salvation, Messiah was to become the personal "Lord" and master of those shepherds. The

implication is surely that those shepherds, famed for their dishonesty, petty crime and disobedience to the Law, actually came to believe in the Lord Jesus.

2:12- see on Mt. 18:4.

*And this will be a sign to you: You shall find a baby wrapped in birth clothes and lying in a manger-* The "sign" that this great salvation was for real was in the very absurdity of a Divine saviour being born in the very lowliest of human situations, placed in a manger from where animals ate, born amidst the smell and sound and dirt of animal excrement. The whole thing had the hallmark of the Divine.

2:13 *And suddenly there was with the angel a crowd of the heavenly host praising God, and saying-* It's important to realize that praise isn't just singing or using musical instruments. In Hebrew the same word means both 'worship' and 'service' (*abodah*). The supposition that praise = music is deeply ingrained in many minds. Thus there is the common assumption that the Angels sang to the shepherds; but in fact they *spoke* their praise.

2:14 *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those in whom He is well pleased-* The peace in view was peace with God, resulting in a lack of fear of condemnation before Him (see on :10,11 and 1:74,77). This peace with God vertically also has a horizontal dimension. A major result of the existence of the Lord's work was unity amongst God's people. If we are not at peace amongst ourselves, then God is not well pleased. The One in whom the Father was well pleased was His Son (Mt. 3:17). Those who are "in Christ" are described therefore with the same language as He is described with. It is by being in Him that we find peace with God, and the grateful recognition and acceptance of this gives glory to Him.

2:15- see on Acts 8:4.

*And it came to pass, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to each other: Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us-* We assume they left their sheep in the field, willing to sacrifice their careers and livelihood for the sake of obedience to the word about the Lord Jesus. The Lord surely had them in mind when He later taught that He was like the shepherd who left His sheep unattended in order to go to the one all important sheep. He reasons as if He identifies with them and they with Him. It could be that these shepherds were keeping flocks which would later be taken to Jerusalem and sold as sacrifices; in which

case we wonder about how far they connected Messiah with the Passover lamb. They went to see the thing which they considered "has some to pass"; they absolutely believed the word spoken.

2:16 *And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger-* The baby was asleep and not feeding; the "sign" had been that they would find the baby in a manger, and this is what happened as they opened the door of the shed. Their response to the word "with haste" fits in with a major Bible theme- that the faithful respond to God's word and the Divine calling immediately and with haste.

2:17 *And when they saw it, they told people about the saying which was spoken to them about this child-* "The saying" was that about "the sign" (:12). It was indeed remarkable; that the Son of God, Israel's Messiah, should be born in the lowest way, in a strange place, to an unmarried teenager, without any human father present, with no money... and the baby was laid down to sleep in a cattle manger in a shed. And this great Messianic secret was revealed not to intellectually rigorous theologians or pious priests, but to a bunch of secular despised shepherds sitting one night on a hillside, interrupted from their lowlife gossip and chatter by a vision of Angels who told them of this great sign. This is absolutely God's way.

2:18 *And all that heard it wondered at the things which were spoken to them by the shepherds-* As noted in :17, "shepherds" were not the most credible of witnesses, and so people "wondered at" rather than "believed" the message. We notice how at the end of Luke, the chosen witnesses include women, who were not allowed to bear credible legal witness, and men who had just been disgraced by their public disloyalty to the Messiah they testified about. And this is why the likes of you and me have likewise been chosen as witnesses.

2:19 *And Mary treasured up all these sayings, pondering them in her heart-* When the shepherds came to worship, Mary pondered within herself what it all meant, as if she was now rather lacking in comprehension. Luke describes his Gospel as a compilation of eyewitness accounts. Where did he get the material from about Mary pondering things in her heart [2:19,51]? Was it from interviewing her himself? Or was her inward meditation and frozenness evident to others who on this basis told Luke?

We read that Mary "kept" God's words in her, yet the Lord in one of His allusions to His dear mother says in Lk. 5:38 that we must preserve or "keep" [s.w.] the new wine of the Gospel in us. The Lord saw His mother

as a pattern for us all. When He heard the comment "Blessed are the breasts which you sucked!", His comment is to draw attention rather to the spiritual side of Mary: "Blessed are they [like My dear mother] who hear the word of God and keep it". Thus He held her up as an example to them all; she shouldn't be marvelled at just because of the fact she carried the Son of God (Catholics take note) but rather because of her reflective and tenacious attitude to the word of God. Mary's song has so many Biblical allusions in it. Mary's Bible minded-ness was really quite something. The Greek word translated "ponder" (Lk. 2:19) comes from *syn*, "with", and *ballein*, "to throw", as if she combined Scripture with her experience of life, seeking to find her place in the mass of OT allusion and teaching which she was being presented with. Her every phrase has multiple allusions to Scripture, which in itself indicates a fair level of intelligence to think on so many levels simultaneously.

The descriptions of Mary as keeping things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,52), and the way it seems she didn't tell Joseph about the Angel's visit, but instead immediately went down to Elisabeth for three months... all these are indications that Mary, like many sensitive people, was a very closed woman. Only when Mary was "found" pregnant by Joseph (Mt. 1:18- s.w. to see, perceive, be obvious) was the situation explained to him by an Angel. It seems His move to divorce her was based on his noticing she was pregnant, and she hadn't given any explanation to him. She "arose" after perhaps being face down on the ground as the Angel spoke with her, and went immediately off to Elisabeth. And then, after three months she returns evidently pregnant (Lk. 1:39). Mary is portrayed as somehow separate from the other ministering women. It would have been psychologically impossible, or at best very hard, for the mother of the Lord to hang around with them. The group dynamics would have been impossible. Likewise in Acts 1:14 we have "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus", as if she is separate from them. She followed Him to Cana, uninvited, and also to Capernaum. Next she is at the cross risking her life, but she isn't among the women who went to the grave. Why not? It was surely natural that she would go there, and that the other women would go with her to comfort her. But she was a loner; either she went alone, as I think I would have tried to, or she just couldn't face contact with the others and simply hid away. And could it be that Jesus, in recognition of her unique perception of Him, appeared to her first privately, in a rightfully unrecorded meeting? But by Acts 1:14, she was in the upper room, as if His death led her to be more reconciled to her brethren, to seek to get along with them... although by nature, in her heart and soul, she was a loner, maybe almost reclusive. A struggler to understand. A meditator, a reflector, who just wanted to be alone, one of those who take their energy from themselves rather than from other people.

*2:20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, just as it had been spoken to them-*

Again we see a connection between the beginning and ending of Luke's Gospel; for he concludes with the disciples praising God in the temple. These shepherds are presented as believers, as converts. They rejoiced in the fulfilment of what had been prophetically told them; and likewise the disciples at the end rejoiced when they perceived how the Old Testament prophetic word had been so accurately fulfilled in the things that happened to the Lord. The "things heard and seen", the "things" preached by the shepherds (:18), the "thing" told by the Angels (:15), all clearly look forward to the "things" concerning the Kingdom and name of Jesus which Luke later says were the basis of the apostolic preaching (Acts 8:5,12). The shepherds are being set up as examples of preachers, telling forth the "things" of the Gospel which they had personally experienced- even when they appeared so strange to secular ears, and were testified by those apparently least qualified to be witnesses.

*2:21 And after eight days, when he was circumcised, his name was called Jesus, which name was given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb-* The obedient naming of John as John rather than Zacharias no doubt encouraged Mary to be likewise obedient. For her son too had been given a name by an Angel before His birth. Our acts of obedience are likewise encouraged by our fellowship with other believers in similar situations who have likewise been obedient and responsive to God's word. We note the chronology; Mary's conception came *after* the Angel appeared to her. Presumably the conception only began after she had demonstrated her belief and desire to partner with God in this profound plan.

*2:22 And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought him up to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord-* There was no Mosaic requirement to take a newborn child to Jerusalem, but despite their poverty, Mary and Joseph clearly tried to do the most they could for the Lord Jesus. Joseph's willing cooperation in all this is to be noted; for it was after all not his child. We can only conclude that he accepted the Lord's virgin birth and willingly went along with it- at least at that time. The Lord was perfect, without any barrier between Himself and the Father; "holy, harmless and separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). The purification ritual was not therefore to remove any sin from Him; it is no sin to be human, to be alive, and this must affect our view of what 'human nature' really is. For all we posit about it we posit about the Lord Jesus, who fully had our nature. The Greek translated "purification" here means literally a washing, and is used many times of how the Lord cleansed lepers and also sinners from their sins. The Lord did so knowing that He Himself had been likewise cleansed.

*2:23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord: Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord)-* Again we note the medical

language of the day; for the womb is not literally opened by the birth of a firstborn child. The quotation from Ex. 13:2 concerns how the dedication of the firstborn was to be a reminder of how the slain lamb had saved the firstborn from death at the time of the exodus. The dedication of the firstborn was therefore to effectively say: 'This child ought to have died. It will not die, but will be dedicated to the Lord as a living death, a life lived out for Him and not for self'. And the Lord was therefore the supreme firstborn, to the point that "the firstborn" is a title for Him (Col. 1:18; Heb. 12:23).

*2:24 And to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord: A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons-* This was the sacrifice for the poor who could not afford an animal; and we have here a picture of their poverty. It was therefore all the more sacrificial for them to have made the journey to Jerusalem for this dedication, when this was not actually required by the Mosaic law. We must carefully note that the Mosaic legislation in Lev. 12:8 stated that the two birds were for the mother; there is no hint that they were a sacrifice for the cleansing of the human nature of the child born. They were for a sin offering and for a burnt offering. It could be fairly argued that they were not in fact necessary in the Lord's case, but Mary made the offering anyway and thereby the Lord's connection with sinful humanity was emphasized. It was for the same reason that He was baptized by John in a baptism which was "for the remission of sins"; not because He was a sinner, but to portray His unity with sinful humanity. They actually offered the birds, whereas Edersheim claims that at the time, the poor usually just dropped the coins which were the price of two birds into the temple coffers, and it was accepted as if the sacrifice had been offered. But Mary insisted on actually offering the birds. When the Lord paid such special attention to the widow woman casting two small coins into the same collection trumpets, He may well have thought of His mother doing the same at His birth, a coin for each of the two birds. Such restimulation is a profound window onto the total nature of His humanity.

*2:25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him-* Simeon waited for "the consolation (comfort) of Israel", referring to the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 40:1,2- and saw it have a fulfilment in the first coming of the Lord. "Simeon", the hearing one or 'the one who was heard', had heard God's word and looked for its fulfilment; and perhaps the idea is also that he had prayed for Messiah's coming, and had been heard. Therefore he was assured that his prayers would be heard, and he would see the Messiah. The consolation of Israel is therefore paralleled with Messiah personally (:26), just as "the hope of Israel" refers to the One for whom Israel hoped,

Jesus the Messiah. We should not over emphasize the material aspect of the Gospel; the implicit hope of eternity in God's Kingdom on earth is in fact secondary to the things about the Lord Jesus. He personally is the hope and consolation of Israel. This tendency is very human, and a reflection of our own deep reservations- to focus upon the material [the things of the material Kingdom on earth] rather than on upon a person, the Lord Jesus, with all the issues involved in a living relationship with that person. Israel at the Lord's time likewise had the emphasis misplaced- upon the material issues of freedom from the Romans, rather than upon the wonder of their King and Messiah coming to save them from their sins through self-sacrifice. The comfort / consolation which we need above all is the comfort that our sins shall not stand between God and us. The Lord refers to Himself as the comforter in Jn. 14-16, promising that the gift of His spirit would mean that His comforting presence remained with His people even after His physical departure.

*2:26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ-* The Spirit being "upon" Simeon (:25) did not make him infallible; but there had been a special revelation to him that his prayers for the coming of Israel's consolation, the Messiah, would be heard. And "Simeon" means just that, 'hearing', in the context of prayer being heard. Therefore he was comforted that he would live to see the Messiah.

*2:27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, that they might do concerning him after the custom of the law-* Mary did not legally have to bring the Lord to the temple; she was poor, as reflected in her inability to offer a lamb but rather two cheap birds. It was a Divinely overruled coincidence that she happened to be in the temple courts at just the time that Simeon entered; Anna likewise (see on :38). This kind of coincidence is simply called being "in the Spirit", and the Spirit is no less active in our encounters and coincidences today. "The parents" is obviously an example of the Biblical record being written from the viewpoint of secular observers; the language of demons is similar. Joseph was not the actual parent, just as demons don't actually exist, but the language of human perception is still used. For language is in a sense a matter of human perception.

*2:28 Then he took him into his arms and blessed God, and said-* It was of "the Spirit" (see on :27) that Simeon recognized that this particular baby, held in the arms of a poor couple offering the poor person's sacrifice, without the fanfare which attended the dedication of babies from more wealthy families, was in fact the Messiah. And in this again we see how God operates, through the lowly and unnoticed by the world.

2:29 *Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word-* "Peace" usually refers to peace with God; we noted on the song of Zacharias that the Lord's birth was understood by the faithful as being essentially about the good news of peace with God through His work and death. Simeon felt he could die at peace with God because of Messiah; he clearly understood that He would atone for his sins.

This is all the language of Jacob being content to die after seeing Joseph. Joseph is simply one of the clearest types of Christ. There are many echoes of Christ which seem to have no specific purpose apart from to confirm us in our enthusiasm to constantly see the spirit of Christ in this record (e.g. Gen. 46:30 LXX = Lk. 2:29,30).

2:30 *For my eyes have seen Your salvation-* 'Jesus', Yehoshua, is literally 'the salvation of Yah'. The 'seeing' of salvation alludes to how Israel were redeemed from Egypt through the slain lamb (Ex. 14:13); Simeon understood this to be representative of Messiah's victory against sin and all Israel's enemies. It is the fulfilment of the "mercy and truth" of the promises to the fathers which enables God's salvation to be seen by all the world (Ps. 98:3). Simeon's desire for the coming of Messiah was therefore rooted in a deep appreciation of the huge spiritual significance of His work and sacrifice, and not from any passing nationalistic desire to see Israel justified. He surely had Ps. 98:3 in mind, for he goes on to speak in :31 of how all the peoples of the world would 'see' what he was now seeing; he realized that he was typical of all who would later come to 'see' the Son.

2:31 *Which You have prepared before the presence of all peoples-* As noted on :30, Simeon has in mind Ps. 98:3, understanding himself as representative of all those worldwide in future ages who would 'see' God's salvation, His 'Jesus'. The translation here is difficult, and the idea is probably that he understood that this child was being prepared for exhibition in the presence of all the Gentile peoples; they in their time would see what he was now seeing. This idea is confirmed in :32.

2:32 *A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel-* The light of Messiah was to be what Israel gloried in, and they were to share that light to the Gentiles. Here we have another reference to the great commission; the glorious light of Israel was to be revealed by them to the world. Simeon had in mind Is. 60:1-3, where Israel were to arise and shine just as their Messiah would. As the Lord said, "you are the light of the world", just as He personally was the light of the world. And because of that, the Gentiles would come to that light in Zion, just as Simeon had come into the temple and see the light. He is presented as representative of all future believers, and he himself perceived this.

2:33 *And his father and his mother were marvelling at the things which were spoken concerning him-* There must have been certain similarities of personality type between the Lord and His mother. Thus in Lk. 2:33 Mary "marvelled", and the same word is used about Jesus in Mt. 8:10 and Mk. 6:6. Again we have here an essay in His humanity. And there is another echo of the Joseph story. "The men marvelled" at Joseph's discernment. Ditto for the Lord Jesus- it is emphasized (Mt. 8:27; 9:8,33; 21:20, 42; 22:22; 27:14; Lk. 2:33; Jn. 4:27; 7:15). Mary had perceived that her son was God's Son, the Messiah; but clearly the extent of the prophetic implications of this were not fully perceived by her. Hence she marvelled at the Biblical allusions made by Simeon.

2:34 *And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother-*Addressing himself to the mother rather than the father is another of Luke's emphases upon the high status of women before God. Simeon surely perceived that this was a virgin birth, and Joseph was not the true father- hence he addressed Mary.

*Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against-* Simeon knew that the good news of Messiah's coming was to be balanced against the fact that the Old Testament taught that He would be the rock of offence over which many would stumble and be broken (Is. 8:14; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8). But he knew that many would rise up broken from that encounter into new life, and the "rising again" also therefore has reference to resurrection at the last day. He would be "spoken against", and yet out of that experience of rejecting Him, some would repent and rise again. Indeed, in 1 Pet. 2:8 Peter seems to assume that all believers will go through this- stumbling in spiritual failure, and yet rising again to new life in Him. Luke will go on in 20:18 to record the Lord developing this logic- He is a stone, and we either fall upon Him and join the community of the broken, or He shall fall upon us as members of this world, and grind us to powder in condemnation- clearly alluding to the stone of Daniel 2. Luke in Acts likes to use this idea of 'speaking against' for the opposition towards the message of the Lord Jesus and those "in Him", who were likewise spoken against; for all that is true of the Lord personally becomes true for we who are in Him (Acts 13:45; 28:19,22). We see in all this how the Lord works through our stumbling; there is hardly a strong believer I know who has not at some time seriously stumbled in their walk.

2:35 *Yes, and a sword shall pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed-*Mary's lack of perception caused her great pain. The way the Lord refers to her as "Woman" both in Cana was, apparently, an unusually cold way for a man to refer to his mother. He effectively rebuffed her in Cana for her lack of perception; He

responds to the woman who tells Him how blessed His mother is by saying that all who hear the word of God and keep it are equally blessed. And when His mother wants to speak to Him, He says in front of the whole crowd that His mothers are all who do God's will. And the final pain must have been at the cross, where in His dying words He tells her that she is no longer His mother, but she must now be the mother of John. Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce her soul (Lk. 2:35- the Syriac text has 'a spear') may refer to her feelings on beholding the literal piercing of her son's side- remembering that He was pierced with "the staff of a spear" (2 Sam. 23:7), it went in so deep. The fact water as well as blood came out is further evidence that the spear penetrated deeply. Yet there is an allusion surely to Is. 49:1,2, where Messiah's mouth is likened to a sharp, piercing sword. Note how the passage has reference to Mary: "The Lord has called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother has he made mention of my name. And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword". Could it not be that Simeon foresaw how the Lord's words would pierce Mary to the quick? For in all the incidents above, she must have thought with a lump in her throat: 'But come on Jesus... I'm your *mum*... the one who knitted and mended your clothes as a child... how can you speak to me like that...?'. And as a sensitive, reflective soul she would have reflected and hurt deeply at these words.

The sword / spear that pierced the Lord pierced her heart, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed". The cross is therefore the ultimate source of self-examination. The Greek for "thoughts" means "inmost thoughts", and all 13 uses of *dialogismos* in the NT are negative-bad thoughts, vain thoughts, doubting thoughts. The five other references in Luke are all very pointedly like this (Lk. 5:22; 6:8; 9:46,47; 24:38). We all find self-understanding and self-examination difficult; and we find it hard to feel our sinfulness as we should. Yet the cross is the ultimate stimulus to self-examination, to conviction of sin, and then of salvation and the reality of grace and God's love. This same process happened for Mary "also". Over the years she had perhaps lost something of her initial humility, feeling that her exalted place in God's plan was due to some personal righteousness, and therefore the cross experience had to pierce her too, so that she too had the inmost thoughts of her heart revealed to herself. We have shown earlier how Mary so identified herself with her dearest Son that she felt in some way part of Messiah. Yet over the years of repetitive domestic life in Nazareth, the height of the call to be "in Christ", really part of Him and His work, must have been ground away. Yet at the cross, her soul was as it were pierced with the same sword / spear that pierced her Son. Ps. 22:20 prophesied how the Lord would suffer "the sword" on the cross, and 2 Sam. 24 had spoken of Him being filled with a spear. "A sword shall pierce through your own soul *also*" meant that as Mary was part of Jesus, so she must also share in His sufferings too. The proud and happy mother as she stood before Simeon

was so thrilled to be as it were "In Christ", connected with Messiah. But she had to be reminded that to share in His life is to share in His death- and it was only the actual experience of the cross which brought this home to her. And so with us, brethren in Christ, and rightfully proud of the high calling and association with Him which we have... there is a darker side to our being in Christ. It involves sharing in His death, that we might share in His life. Mary's achievement of this is perhaps reflected in the way the mother of the man child [Jesus] in Rev. 12 is persecuted after the pattern of her Son Jesus, and yet survives.

As Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms, he saw in that beautiful little boy something terrible; for he looked ahead to how His soul would one day be pierced in crucifixion, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed". The same word is used for how thoughts will be revealed at the judgment (Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). In the piercing of the Son of God, the thoughts of hearts would be revealed. But the question arises: revealed to whom? We may (rightly) assume: to ourselves. But Luke's Gospel emphasizes the ability of the Lord Jesus to know human hearts (5:22; 6:8; 9:2,6,47; 24:38). Could it not be that the cross is used by the Father and Son to know the minds of men? They see in our response to it the real you and the real me. See on 1 Cor. 11:32.

The cross leads to thoughts being *revealed*; and the judgment process likewise will lead to thoughts being revealed (s.w. in Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). The Lord's death is described as His washing "his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:11 RV). Treading out the grapes is a Hebraism for judgment, and yet it is used here and in Is. 63:1-3 regarding the Lord's treading of the winepress alone in His death. Indeed, the Isaiah passage is clearly applicable to both the crucifixion and the final judgment of the Lord Jesus. The reason being, that in His death was the judgment of this world.

We should note that as Mary's soul was pierced at the death of her son, so was the Father's. For "they shall look upon me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10) in its context speaks of the Father and not the Son. So in the Son's piercing, the Father and mother were likewise pierced. The Divine-human family were united at that tragic moment.

*2:36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity-*

Hannah's example not only influenced Mary, but also Anna's. 'Anna' is an unusual first century name; "of the 247 Jewish women in Palestine from the period 330 BCE - 200 CE whose names are known, Anna [in Luke 2]

is the only one who bears this name" (Tal Ilan, 'Notes of the distribution of Jewish women's names in Palestine', Journal of Jewish Studies Vol. 40 (1989) pp. 186,193). She therefore named herself this after Hannah, the Hebrew equivalent of Anna; she was inspired by Hannah's example of waiting and praying in the sanctuary for a child. For Anna, the coming of Messiah was equivalent to having her own child. Her hope for Messiah's coming was something which she felt personally. We too are awaiting the Lord's coming- but with anything of her intensity and feeling? She looked for redemption to appear in Jerusalem (Lk. 2:25,38), clearly alluding to the LXX of Is. 52:9: "The Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem". She saw the coming of that little baby as the redemption of God's people; she had the faith to see things yet unseen. The Hebrew for 'redemption' can imply 'with blood'- is it going too far to suggest that she perceived the need for that little baby to grow up and then shed His blood for Israel's redemption? Her father's name, Phanuel, is the Hebrew 'Peniel', meaning 'the face of God'. And 'Hannah' means 'God's grace'. Straight away we see a link to Num. 6:25: "The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you". The connection implies God's passionate joy at her attitude and existence. Her remaining in the temple was perhaps inspired by passages like Ps. 27:4, where David spoke of his desire to dwell in the temple all the days of his life in order to see God's beauty- which she understood in terms of His Son. And especially, Mal. 3:1, which speaks of the Lord's coming to His temple. We must ask ourselves what our Bible study and knowledge actually leads to. A study of Romans 6 may lead to baptism; but all God's word demands of us an actual and concrete response in the things of real life. She allowed the example of another woman, Hannah, to influence her, perhaps even to the point of changing her name; what of us?

*2:37 And she had been a widow eighty four years. She departed not from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day-* She "departed not" in the sense that she was regularly present for the morning and evening sacrifices and prayers. She "came up" to the temple to worship (:38) so she was not actually there all the time. Again we have the language of observed experience, as we have with demons. It appeared that she never left the temple, just as small children have the impression that their school teachers live at the school.

Men like David, Hezekiah and Daniel appreciated that God knew already. In a sense, all that will happen has happened; so prayer is an opening up of ourselves to God, a *service* ['worshiping'] of God (Dan. 6:16; Lk. 2:37), for His glory and for our benefit, rather than a means of communicating information to Him. Therefore they opened themselves up to Him, expressing their understanding that He knew the situation, and didn't present a long list of concrete requests to Him. Their relationship with Him went far beyond that kind of surface level. What of ours?

2:38 *And coming up to worship at that very same hour, she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all those that were looking for redemption in Jerusalem-* See on :36. The loyal band of Bible students in the temple expected redemption to appear in Jerusalem, presumably because of the Old Testament prophecies like Joel 2 concerning Christ being manifested in Jerusalem at His second coming and Kingdom. But their first century application of these was not wrong. "At that very same hour" reflects the same kind of Divine coincidence that we noted on :27. No meeting is by chance for those who are led by the Spirit.

2:39 *And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city Nazareth-* Mary "performed [fulfilled] all things according to the law" in her dedication of Jesus. In doing this, she anticipated the spirit of the cross and whole ministry of Jesus, where He performed [s.w. fulfilled] all things of the law- Lk. 18:31; Jn. 19:28; 30; Acts 13:29. These passages each use the same three words for all things, law, and fulfilled. She brought the Lord up in the way of the cross; and He continued in that path.

2:40 *And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him-* "Grace" often refers to the gift of the Spirit. The parallel is with the growth of John the Baptist in 1:80, who was strong in the Spirit, and filled with the Spirit from the womb.

Hebrews always speaks of Him as "perfected", as a verb (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28)- never with the adjective 'perfect'. Apart from being a major problem for Trinitarian views, this simple fact sets Him up as *our* pattern, whom the Father seeks likewise 'to perfect'. Yet the path the Lord had to take to achieve this was hard indeed. Not only did it culminate in the cross, but His growth as a young man is described by the word *prokoptein* (Lk. 2:40,52), defined by Karl Barth [*Church Dogmatics* I 2, p. 158] as meaning 'to extend by blows, as a smith stretches metal by hammering'. Through childhood crises and the turmoil of adolescence, this is what He went through, to lead Him to the final 'perfection' of being able to say "I am".

2:41 *And his parents went up every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover-* It was only the enthusiasts who went to Jerusalem every year. The Mosaic command was that every male should appear; but Mary went too. Perhaps she was motivated by the example of her heroine Hannah, who also went up to the tabernacle each year (1 Sam. 1:7). We can conclude that Joseph was indeed a spiritual person, and that Mary supported him in this. For her to go to Jerusalem every year for the first 12 years of marriage indicates that she placed great priority on it; for she

would surely at times have been pregnant, yet she still made the pilgrimage.

*2:42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to the tradition of the feast-* There was no legal requirement for this; but they are presented as obedient to Jewish tradition.

*2:43 And when they had finished the days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem; and his parents knew it not-* "The days" which they "finished" may refer not to Passover but to the traditional dedication of a 12 year old boy. The Lord clearly wanted to remain in Jerusalem, and may well have arranged circumstances so that His parents would not initially notice His absence. He must have felt some need to do His true Father's business in His house at that time; perhaps He felt the need to make a first appeal to the Jewish leadership at that time.

*2:44 Supposing him to be in the company, they went a day's journey; and then they looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances-* It has been speculated that men and women travelled in different companies, and so Joseph assumed the Lord was with Mary, and vice versa. But we cannot avoid a suspicion of negligence on their part, especially given that He was known by them to be God's Son.

*2:45 And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him-* The Lord gently rebukes them for not knowing that He would be in the temple; we note that they searched for three days (:46) before thinking to look for Him in the temple. Presumably He had made some comment to them about His need to remain three days in the temple, and they had not perceived His sense at all. This all paves the way for how His clear predictions of His three days disappearance in death were likewise not understood. His followers came seeking Him at that time, but in the wrong way and place. His clearly stated words at this time were not understood, just as His later words about His resurrection would not be.

*2:46 And it came to pass, after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them and asking them questions-* The three days were clearly a significant period; see on :45. The Lord presumably slept rough, perhaps on the mount of Olives. By that age He would already have perceived much about His death and how it would all transpire, and wished to familiarize himself with the city where it would all happen. He is often portrayed later as sitting in the midst of His students; here, at 12 years old, the teachers are already His students. His asking of questions may not necessarily mean that He asked them

things He didn't know; it could refer to the rabbinic method of teaching by asking rhetorical questions, a style frequently used by the Lord.

*2:47 And all that heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers-* See on Acts 2:7. These men who were so impressed by His intellect and insight would have had amongst them some who 18 years later would have encountered Him again, and become filled with the same envy which perhaps began to well up within them even then. As He posed rhetorical questions to them, so they did to Him; and they were amazed at His answers. Despite this intellectual and spiritual supremacy which the Lord had as Son of God, His neighbours and family considered Him a mere carpenter and were offended when He indirectly claimed to be Messiah. We can deduce that He clearly held Himself back from revealing Himself as radically different from the rest of them. It would have been so frustrating and irritating to be so intellectually and spiritually more developed than others, and yet to say nothing, time and again, and relate with them on their level.

*2:48 And when they saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him: Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you-* "Anxiously searching" is "sorrowing", using a word elsewhere used about despair and anguish for the loss of life (Lk. 16:24,25; Acts 20:38). She feared He was dead. But where, then, was her faith in the promise that He would have an eternal Kingdom...? The distraction of poverty, the demands of the other children, perhaps an unsupportive partner, self-doubt... all these ground away at her earlier spirituality and faith, just as happens to so many of us after baptism too.

"Why have you done this to us?" is a rebuke- as if she implied that Jesus had sinned / done wrong by what He had done? Surely her faith in a sinless Messiah was now put to a brutal test by a domestic upset; just as, in barest essence, ours is too by such things. Yet notice that she frames those words in the LXX language of Gen. 3:14; 4:10; 1 Sam. 13:11. Those allusions would imply that she felt Jesus had sinned; and yet at the same time as revealing that gross lack of perception, another part of her mind is still back in Scripture. Unlike 12 years previously, she is now using Scripture without correct context; but she has far from totally lost her spirituality.

Mary and Joseph were "astonished". She shared Joseph's amazement; and the word is only used of the amazement / incomprehension of the crowds- Mt. 7:28; 13:54; 19:25; 22:33; Mk. 10:26. Slowly she became influenced by the world's view of her son- not totally, but partially, to the extent that she lost that keen perception and height of spiritual ambition which she had earlier had. And so it can be for so many of us; the world

comes to influence our view not only of our own children, but of all things in spiritual life.

Mary scolds Him that his father [Joseph] and her have been seeking for Him. The surrounding world perceived Him as the carpenter's son (Mt. 13:55), the son of Joseph (Jn. 6:42). He was "as was supposed" ["reckoned legally?"] the son of Joseph" (Lk. 3:23). Even Philip perceived Messiah to be "the son of Joseph" even after he had accepted Him (Jn. 1:45). Hence Jesus gently rebuked her that He was about His true Father's business, in His true Father's house. Her description of Joseph as "thy father" is surely worthy of the Lord's rebuke. She had allowed the views of the world to influence her view of the Lord. "Is not this the son of Mary?" (Mk. 6:3) is paralleled in Mt. 13:55 by "the carpenter's son", and in Lk. 4:22 Joseph's son; everyone assumed they were His natural parents, the son of Mary & Joseph, and this came to influence her. Jesus told them that they should have sought Him in His true Father's house- and this may not only be a reference to the temple, but to the way in which they had assumed He was somewhere with the house / family of Joseph in the convoy; and perhaps they had gone round Joseph's relatives in Jerusalem hunting for Him.

*2:49 And he said to them: How is it you searched for me? Did you not know that I would be in my Father's house?*- I suggested on :45 that the Lord had in fact told them that He was going to be in His Father's house, the temple, for three days. They had misunderstood or ignored His words; just as His followers would do to His later predictions of His three days 'disappearance'.

There are Biblical examples of refusing to take guilt when others feel that it should be taken. The Lord's own parents blamed Him for 'making them anxious' by 'irresponsibly' remaining behind in the temple. The Lord refused to take any guilt, didn't apologize, and even gently rebuked them (Lk. 2:42-51). In similar vein, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Even if I made you sorry with a letter, I do not regret it" (2 Cor. 7:8). He would not take guilt for their being upset with him. Likewise Absalom comforted his raped sister not to 'take it to heart', not to feel guilty about it, as it seems she was feeling that way, taking false guilt upon her (2 Sam. 13:20).

A window into the Lord's self-perception is given here in the record of His behaviour in the temple at age 12. Within the psychological matrix in which the young Jesus existed, as well as within the cultural norms of first century Palestine, it was rude for a 12 year old to retort to his mother: "Didn't you know I would be about my father's business?". It appears insolent towards Joseph too. But that statement, in the Lord's case, was

not a sin, nor a typically precocious childish comment- although it would've been on the lips of any other 12 year old. Instead it reflects an abnormal degree of detachment from His mother and step-father, and a remarkable statement as to how much He was Himself, how mature and strong was His sense of identity as the uniquely begotten Son of God.

A sense of compulsion was found in the Lord's whole life of service, leading up to the cross as it did (see on Mk. 14:49):

"Wist ye not that *I must be* about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49 AV). "And he said unto them, *I must preach* the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43). "He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he *must needs* go through Samaria" (John 4:3-4). This is significant, as this was not from geographical necessity. The Lord was in the Jordan valley (Jn. 3:22) and could easily have taken the valley road north through Bethshan into Galilee, avoiding Samaria entirely. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

2:50 *And they did not understand what he spoke to them-* He had told them that He would be in His Father's house for three days. But they did not understand. And now they see plainly what has happened, they still do not understand. This is exactly the situation we find at the end of Luke's gospel, where the resurrected Lord [after three days disappearance] is still not understood.

Lk. 2:50 records that Mary "understood not", using the same phrase as is on the lips of the Lord in Mt. 13:13, speaking of those without who "hear not neither do they understand"; and ominously, Mary stood without and asked to see Jesus, only to be told that His real mothers were those women sitting around Him listening to His words. In passing, note how the disciples also often "understood not" (Mt. 16:12; Mk. 6:52; 8:17,21; Lk. 18:34). And yet the Lord counted them as more understanding than they were. As with Mary. She "understood not" (Lk. 2:50) the clear enough statement that He was in *His* Father's house. And the Lord rebuked her for spending so long, three days, looking elsewhere when she should have perceived quicker that He was going to be in the house of His true Father. I take His words not as a sharp rebuff but rather more of grief, that Mary had known him so poorly, sad at her loss of perception.

2:51 *And he left with them and went to Nazareth, and was subject to them; and his mother treasured all these sayings in her heart-* It could be that she had pondered from the LXX of Gen. 37:11 how Jacob "observed" (s.w.) the saying of Joseph / Jesus, and therefore felt that she too must meditate on all the words associated with her Son. The Lord at 12 years old displayed such piercing knowledge and spirituality, but it seems He returned to Nazareth and suppressed the expression of it. This is why the villagers were so amazed when He stood up in the Nazareth synagogue

and on the basis of Old Testament exposition, indirectly declared Himself the Messiah. He must have stored up so much knowledge and spirituality within Him, but hid it from the eyes of men. This was quite an achievement- to be perfect, and yet not to be noticed as somehow other-worldly. The Lord was "subject unto" Mary- to train Him for the time when we would be subject to Him as we are now (1 Cor. 15:27,28; Eph. 1:22; 5:24), and all the world subject unto Him (1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 2:8). And so, wondrous thought that it is, the training of His mother has effect even now; with literally *all* subject to Him, He was prepared for this by having been subject unto His mother.

2:52- see on Mk. 6:2; Lk. 2:19.

*And Jesus developed both in wisdom and body, and in favour with God and men-* A Joseph allusion: "The Lord... gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Gen. 39:21). As noted on :40, Hebrews always speaks of Him as "perfected" or as we have it here in Luke, "developed", as a verb (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28)- never with the adjective 'perfect'. Apart from being a major problem for Trinitarian views, this simple fact sets Him up as *our* pattern, whom the Father seeks likewise 'to perfect'. Yet the path the Lord had to take to achieve this was hard indeed. Not only did it culminate in the cross, but His growth as a young man is described by the word *prokoptein* (Lk. 2:40,52), defined by Karl Barth [*Church Dogmatics* I 2, p. 158] as meaning 'to extend by blows, as a smith stretches metal by hammering'. Through childhood crises and the turmoil of adolescence, this is what He went through, to lead Him to the final 'perfection' of being able to say "I am".

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene-* Luke's careful attention to historical detail is understandable if his Gospel was partly written for use in Paul's defence whilst imprisoned in Caesarea and / or Rome. And the material is also used specifically to seek to convert Theophilus.

3:2 *In the highpriesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness-* John came preaching the word (Mt. 3:1); and the word came to John. All witness and evangelism is a reflection of an ongoing mutual relationship between God and the preacher, mediated through His word. John's message of repentance (:3) was taken from the word of God in the Old Testament; and so the word of God which came to him was perhaps the command to begin his ministry. He had been in the wilderness from a young man, awaiting the call to begin his ministry. We have here another example of a man experiencing a period in the wilderness before starting his ministry; Moses, Paul and the Lord Jesus are other examples. And in essence the same is often the pattern in human life today.

3:3 *And he came into all the region round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins-* Presumably this connects with Mt. 2:23, meaning that whilst the Lord was still living in Nazareth, John began preaching. One wonders whether John maybe began his ministry up to three and a half years before the baptism of Jesus, seeing his work was typical of the three and a half year Elijah ministry preparing for the *second* coming of the Lord Jesus.

The two clauses in this sentence appear to be the wrong way around. We would expect to read that John came preaching baptism, and then baptized people. One way around the problem is to imagine that the second clause ("preaching the baptism...") is as it were in brackets, explaining that the baptism he performed was not Christian baptism but simply a sign of repentance and request for remission of sins. But Mt. 3:11 makes it explicit that his baptism *preceded* the call for repentance. "Baptize... unto repentance" alludes to the Isaiah 40 passage which offered forgiveness in order to provoke repentance. John baptized in order to lead people to repentance, rather than baptizing only those who had repented and got their lives in order. Even the NET Bible's "baptize... for repentance" could be read the same way- baptism was for the end of provoking repentance, rather than being baptism only for the visibly repentant. This likelihood is strengthened once we realize that there is surely an allusion here to Wisdom 11:23: "You overlook the sins of men, unto repentance". Repentance in any case is an internal attitude (see on Mt. 3:6), and John as he stood in the Jordan River was totally incapable of

judging whether or not in practice his hearers had actually changed their lives. He baptized them because they had confessed their sins and re-thought, re-pented. Not because they had actually changed in practical, ongoing lifestyle issues. Likewise the apostles who baptized 3000 people in Acts 2 had no way of measuring repentance in practice. Mk. 1:15 records John's message as being: "Repent ye and believe the Gospel". This might seem to be in the wrong order- for we have come to think that surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does very often- but there is another option here- that the repentance is ongoing. Life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place.

The Greek *metanoia* ["repentance"] was used as a legal term describing the re-thinking of a sentence. Paul uses this figure in Romans to describe how we are condemned as guilty, but the sentence is re-thought because we are in Christ. Strong's lexicon claims that the word can mean "by implication, reversal of another's decision". Our re-thinking thus becomes God's re-thinking. In this we see something of the intimacy and connection between God and man achieved by human repentance. The legal metaphor continues in the word translated "remission"- the idea is of legal pardon or freedom from the accusation.

John the Baptist's audience responded to his preaching by being baptized "with the baptism of repentance" (Mk. 1:4); and yet the Lord Jesus built on this by appealing to people to repent because the Kingdom was at hand (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 3:2). Their repentance was therefore only surface level. The Lord cursed the fig tree (cp. Israel) because they had only leaves, an appearance of repentance and spiritual fruit, but actually there was not even the first sign of real fruit on that tree when it was really analysed. Earlier, Israel had appeared to have fruit, when actually, they didn't have any at all (Hos. 10:1). The man in the parable built his spiritual house, but in fact he didn't get down to the real nitty-gritty of obedience to the Lord's words; and so it miserably, pathetically fell at judgment day. The seriousness of sin becomes de-emphasized in our lives, until repentance comes to mean a vague twinge of guilt. This, again, was the problem of Old Testament Israel. "They return, but not to the Most High" (Hos. 7:16); they had the sensation of regret, of turning back- but it wasn't real repentance. A few verses earlier God had commented: "They do *not* return to the Lord their God" (Hos. 7:10); but they on a surface level *did* return to Him. Hosea continues his theme: "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself" (Hos. 10:1). Did they or did they not bring forth fruit? They did- but only in their own eyes. They felt they had repented, and brought forth spiritual fruit. But not in God's estimation. And we too can have the sensation of spirituality and even spiritual growth, but only in our own eyes. "Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7) in the way which true repentance requires. "Judah hath not turned unto me with

her *whole* heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3:10). They did turn back to Yahweh- but not in their heart. Israel rejoiced in the light of John's teaching- and he taught real, on-your-knees repentance. They thought they'd repented. But the Lord describes John as mourning, and them not mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it.

3:4 *As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: The voice of one crying, In the wilderness make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight-* Just as the preaching of the Gospel was to make straight paths for the Messiah to come, so we are to make *our* paths straight (Heb. 12:13)- as if somehow we are the Lord Jesus; His revelation to this world at the second coming will in a sense be our revelation. Hence the final visions of Revelation speak of the Lord's second coming in terms which are applicable to the community of those in Him [e.g. a city of people coming down from Heaven to earth]. John's preaching was in order to make [s.w. 'to bring forth fruit'] His [the Lord's] paths straight- but the ways of the Lord are "right" [s.w. "straight"] anyway (Acts 13:10). So how could John's preaching make the Lord's ways straight / right, when they already are? God is so associated with His people that their straightness or crookedness reflects upon Him; for they are His witnesses in this world. His ways are their ways. This is the N.T. equivalent of the O.T. concept of keeping / walking in the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; 2 Kings 21:22). Perhaps this is the thought behind the exhortation of Heb. 12:13 to make straight paths for our own feet. We are to bring our ways into harmony with the Lord's ways; for He is to be us, His ways our ways. Thus Is. 40:3, which is being quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way of *the Lord*", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way of *the people*". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25).

There was an intensity and critical urgency about John and his message. John urged people to make their path "straight"- using a Greek word elsewhere translated "immediately", "forthwith" (s.w. Mk. 1:12,28 and often). Getting things straight in our lives is a question of immediate response. He warns people to "flee from the wrath to come" (Lk. 3:7). This was what their changed lives and baptisms were to be about- a fleeing from the wrath to come. He speaks as if that "wrath to come" is just about to come, it's staring them in the face like a wall of forest fire, and they are to flee away from it. And yet Paul (in one of his many allusions to John's message, which perhaps he had heard himself 'live') speaks of "the wrath to come" as being the wrath of the final judgment (1 Thess. 1:10), or possibly that of AD70 (1 Thess. 2:16). But both those events would not have come upon the majority of John's audience. And the day of 'wrath to come' is clearly ultimately to be at the Lord's return (Rev. 6:17; 11:18). Yet John zooms his hearers forward in time, to

perceive that they face condemnation and judgment day right now, as they hear the call of the Gospel. This was a feature of John; he had the faith which sees things which are not as though they already are. Thus he looked at Jesus walking towards him and commented that here was the "Lamb of God", a phrase the Jews would've understood as referring to the lamb which was about to be sacrificed on Passover (Jn. 1:29). John presumably was referencing the description of the crucified Jesus in Is. 53:7; for John, he foresaw it all, it was as if he saw Jesus as already being led out to die, even though that event was over three years distant. And so he could appeal to his audience to face judgment day as if they were standing there already. We need to have the same perspective.

*3:5 Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked paths shall become straight, and the rough ways smooth-* John the Baptist's ministry was so that the 'crooked' nation of Israel should be 'made straight' and ready to accept Jesus as Messiah. God's enabling power was present so that this might have happened; but the same word is used in Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:15 to describe Israel as still being a 'crooked' nation. John's preaching, like ours, was potentially able to bring about the conversion of an entire nation. So instead of being discouraged by the lack of response to our witness, let's remember the enormous potential power which there is behind it. Every word, witness of any kind, tract left lying on a seat... has such huge potential conversion power lodged within it, a power from God Himself.

John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low*' the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ. Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its' effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13).

*3:6 And all flesh-* See on Mt. 3:3.

*Shall see the salvation of God-* John perceived how eager God is to forgive, and how our acceptance of that forgiveness is His glory and His salvation. John says, quoting Is. 40:5, that if men repent and ready themselves for the Lord's coming, then "all flesh shall see the salvation of God". But he is changing the quotation- Isaiah said that all flesh shall see the glory of God. But saving men and women is the thing God glories in.

*3:7 He said to the crowds that went out to be baptized by him: You*

*offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*- The ideas of fleeing wrath and preparing a way are surely based upon the Law's command in Dt. 19:3 that a way or road should be prepared to the city of refuge (symbolic of Christ- Heb. 6:18), along which the person under the death sentence for manslaughter could flee for refuge. John was preparing that way or road to Christ, and urging ordinary people to flee along it. They didn't like to think they were under a death sentence for murder. They were just ordinary folk like the soldiers who grumbled about their wages, and the publicans who were a bit less than honest at work. But they had to flee. But they wouldn't be alone in that. If a man prepares his way after God's principles (2 Chron. 27:6; Prov. 4:26), then God will 'prepare' that man's way too (Ps. 37:23; 119:5), confirming him in the way of escape.

This intense, urgent presentation of the ultimate issues of life and death, acceptance and rejection, brought forth a massive response. People lined up for baptism. And John was hardly polite. He called his baptismal candidates a "generation of vipers", alluding obviously to the seed of the serpent in Gen. 3:15. Yet his tough line with them, his convicting them of sin, led them to ask what precisely they must do, in order to be baptized. They didn't turn away in offence. They somehow sensed he was for real, and the message he preached couldn't be ignored or shrugged off as the ravings of a fanatic. Time and again we see the same- the very height of the demand of Christ of itself convicts men and women of Him. And it's for this reason that it seems almost 'easier' to convict people of Christ and the need for baptism into Him in societies [e.g. radical Moslem ones] where the price for conversion to Him is death or serious persecution... than in the easy going Western countries where being 'Christian' is the normal cultural thing to do.

The Gospel was presented in different forms by the early preachers, according to their audience. John the Baptist set the pattern in this. Having quoted the prophecy about the need for the rough to be made smooth and the proud to be humbled in order for them to accept Jesus, John "said *therefore* to the multitude... ye offspring of vipers" (Lk. 3:7 RV). He used tough and startling language because that was what the audience required. He had set his aims- to humble the proud. And so he used "therefore" appropriate approaches. The early preachers as Paul became all things to all men, so that they might win some. They therefore consciously matched their presentation and *how* they articulated the same basic truths to their audience.

But perhaps even his comment "Generation of vipers" was said with a heart of love and appeal, reflecting the "heart of mercy" which he had come to know in the Father. He was "the friend of the bridegroom" (Jn. 3:29)- the one who introduced the groom to the bride and arranged the

marriage and then the wedding. John's "Generation of vipers" stuff was all part of his attempt to persuade the bride, Israel, to accept the groom, the Lord Jesus. He wasn't angrily moralizing, lashing out at society as many a dysfunctional preacher does today, working out his own anger by criticizing and condemning society in the name of God. No, John was appealing. He had an agenda and an aim- to bring Israel and the Son of God together in marriage.

When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice". He was nothing; his message about Jesus was everything. In all this there is a far cry from the self-confident, self-projecting speaking off the podium which characterizes so much of our 'preaching' today. So John's appeal to repentance was shot through with a recognition of his own humanity. It wasn't mere moralizing. We likely don't preach as John did because we fear that confronting people with their sins is inappropriate for us to do, because we too are sinners. But with recognition of our own humanity, we build a bridge between our audience and ourselves. In this context it's worth reconsidering Lk. 3:7: "Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?". John said these words to those who were coming to him wishing to be baptized by him- exactly because he had warned them of the wrath to come. It's possible that John meant this as a rhetorical reflection, thus enabling us to paraphrase him something like this: 'And what kind of man am I, who am I, just another sinful guy like you, who has warned you to flee? I'm nothing- don't get baptized because of me, but because you repent and are committed to bringing forth the fruits of repentance'. And it's worth meditating that if Israel had responded to his preaching, then the glorious salvation of God might have even then been revealed in the form of the Kingdom coming on earth, even then. But instead of heeding John's message, Israel in the end crucified their King, necessitating a latter day John the Baptist mission (Mt. 11:13,14; 17:11,12). And it's not going too far to suggest that our latter day witness to Israel and indeed to the world is to be conducted in the spirit of John's preaching; hence the crucial importance of understanding the spirit and content of his witness.

*3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves: We have Abraham as our father. For I say to you, that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones-* The eagerness of John for the inculcation of faith is seen in the way He foresees the likely thought processes within men. "Begin not to say within yourselves...." (Lk. 3:8), He told a generation of vipers; and the Lord eagerly strengthened the centurion's faith when it was announced that faith was pointless, because his daughter had died. Always the Biblical emphasis is upon internal thought processes and the need to be aware of them. John's great convert Paul several times uses the same device in his

letters- foreseeing the likely thought process in response to his message, and answering it ahead of time (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:35).

"These stones" was said perhaps pointing to the stones. Perhaps they were the 12 stones set up after the Jordan crossing (Josh. 3 and 4). There is a word play between *avanim*, stones, and *banim*, sons. *Avanim*, stones, in turn sounds like *evyonim*, the term for the poor, the social outcasts- these were the "stones" which were being accepted into the covenant of grace.

3:9- see on Lk. 13:8; Col. 3:13.

*And even now, the axe also lies at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bring forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire-* John's words about cutting down the fruitless tree are directly quoted by the Lord Jesus in Mt. 7:17-19; 12:33- as if to show His solidarity with John's teaching. Perhaps the Lord Jesus had heard these very words being preached by John when He went to be baptized by him. "Now [also]", right now; John felt that the day of Christ's judgment was very close. The language of gathering grain into the barn and burning the chaff is used by the Lord concerning the future judgment at His second coming (Mt. 13:30). John saw the Lord Jesus as already having the winnowing fork in His hand (Mt. 3:13), meaning that in essence, judgment began with the ministry of Jesus. In essence, we stand before His judgment right now. Judgment day is not some unknown future entity which has no connection with this life.

3:10 *And the crowds asked him, saying: What then must we do?-* Luke phrases this in the same language he uses of the crowds who responded to Peter's preaching in Acts 2. The answer was the same- repent, accept Jesus as Messiah and be baptized. John saw the essence of the Christian gospel as just that, and it was essentially the same message taught by both John and Peter.

3:11 *And he answered and said to them: He that has two coats, let him give to him that has none, and he that has food, let him do likewise-* In order to prepare the way of the Lord, to make a level passage for Him, the man with two coats should give to him who had none, and likewise share his food. So the 'equality' and levelling was to be one of practical care for others. We have to ask, how often we have shared our food, clothing or money with those who don't have... for this is all part of preparing for the Lord's coming. It could even be that when there is more of what Paul calls "an equality" amongst the community of believers, that then the way of the Lord will have been prepared. And He will then return.

3:12 *And there came also tax collectors to be baptized; and they said to*

*him: Teacher, what must we do?*- There is a parallel between desiring baptism and realizing that they must *do* something concretely in their lives. The baptism process brings us into the realm of God's gracious forgiveness and redemption, and into living contact with the real Christ. There is no way we can be passive to this and do nothing about it. Note that Matthew himself was a publican and also records this- this is an example of the Gospel records being a transcript of the message standardly taught by e.g. Matthew.

*3:13 And he said to them: Collect no more than what you have been ordered to-* John the Baptist showed a spirit of concession to human weakness in his preaching. He told the publicans: "Extort no more than that which is appointed you" (Lk. 3:13 RV). He tacitly accepted that these men would be into extortion. But within limits, he let it go. Likewise he told soldiers to be content with their wages- not to quit the job. And seeing there were no Roman Legions in Judaea at his time [Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.1], these were likely Jewish soldiers.

*3:14 And soldiers also asked him, saying: And we, what must we do? And he said to them: Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages-*

The nature of how demanding John was is reflected in his response to the soldiers and publicans. He didn't tell them to quit their jobs, but to live with integrity within those jobs. He told the soldiers to be content with their wages- implying he expected them to not throw in their job. And seeing there were no Roman Legions in Judaea at his time [Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.1], these were likely Jewish soldiers. He didn't tell them to quit their jobs, but to live with integrity within those jobs. He told the soldiers to be content with their wages- implying he expected them to not throw in their job. This is juxtaposed with the command for them to do no violence. But not grumbling about wages was as fundamental an issue for John as not doing physical violence to people. To have as Paul put it "Godliness with contentment" [another of his allusions to John's preaching?] is as important as not doing violence. And yet our tendency is to think that moaning about our wages is a perfectly normal and acceptable thing to do, whereas violence is of an altogether different order. It's like Paul hitting the Corinthians for their divisiveness, when if we'd been writing to them we would likely have focused upon their immorality and false doctrine. John would have been far less demanding had he simply told the publicans and soldiers to quit their jobs. By asking them to continue, and yet to live out their lives within those jobs with Godly principles, He was being far more demanding.

John places complaining about wages [a common human fault] in juxtaposition with doing violence to others (Lk. 3:14)- to show that in his

serious call to a devout and holy life, there are no such things as little sins. Ez. 16:49,50 defines the sins of Sodom as including "pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor... they were haughty, and committed abomination". The abomination of their sexual perversion is placed last in the list, as if to emphasize that all the other sins were just as much sin. Likewise Paul writes to the Corinthians about their failures, but he doesn't start where I would have started- with their drunkenness at the memorial meeting. Instead he starts off with their disunity. Those things which we may consider as lesser sins, the Bible continually lists together with those things we have been conditioned into thinking are the greater sins. Clearest of all is the way Paul lists schism and hatred in his lists of sins that will exclude from the Kingdom. The Anglo-Saxon worldview has taught that sexual sin is so infinitely far worse than a bit of argument within a church. But is this really right...?

3:15 *And as the people were in expectation, and all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John, whether he was the Christ-*

3:16 *John answered, saying to them all: I indeed baptize you with water, but there comes he that is mightier than I, whose shoelaces I am not worthy to untie. He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire-* The Greek for "mightier" is that translated 'stronger' and the idea of Jesus as the one 'stronger / mightier than' recurs in Lk. 11:22, where Jesus is 'mightier than' the 'strong man' who had previously possessed the house of Israel. That there is a connection of thought here cannot be denied, but the existence of such a connection doesn't of itself mean that there is a detailed semantic connection. Perhaps John's words had simply left a subconscious impression upon the word choice of the Lord.

Christ "shall baptize *you*" plural was deeply meditated upon by Paul, until he came to see in the fact that we *plural* are baptized the strong implication that therefore we should be one body, without unnecessary divisions (= 1 Cor. 12:13).

John prophesied that the disciples would be baptized with fire; this was fulfilled by tongues of Spirit descending which looked like fire (Acts 2:3). Evidently this was not literal fire or else it would not have rested on the heads of the disciples. So the words here spoke of how things would *appear* to the disciples, without saying so explicitly.

John described himself as a preacher of Christ who was not "worthy" to do so. The same Greek word is used by Paul when he says he is "not *meet* (s.w.) to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. 15:9); and that it was God's grace alone that had made him an "*able* (s.w. "worthy") minister of the Gospel" (2 Cor. 13:6). He knew that his "*sufficiency*" (s.w. "worthy")

to give knowledge of salvation (John language- Lk. 1:77), to be a preacher, was from God alone (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5); and that in fact this was true of *all* preachers. But do we really feel like this in our preaching? John was a burning and shining light to the world (Jn. 5:35), just as we should be (Phil. 2:15). And therefore, if we are to witness as John did, we need to have the humility of John in our preaching. He was 'in the Truth' from a baby, he lived a spiritual, self-controlled life. And yet he had this great sense of personal sinfulness and unworthiness as a preacher. It's difficult for those raised Christian to have the sense of sinfulness which Paul had, and thereby to have his zeal for preaching. But actually his zeal was a reflection of John's; and John was a 'good boy', brought up in the Faith. Yet he had a burning sense of his spiritual inadequacy. Anglo-Saxon Christianity urgently needs to capture his spirit. Truly Paul 'bore' Christ to the world just as John 'bore' (s.w.) Christ's Gospel (Acts 9:15 = Mt. 3:11). If ever a man was hard on himself, it was John the Baptist. His comment on his preaching of Christ was that he was not worthy (RVmg. 'sufficient') to bear Christ's sandals (Mt. 3:11). The sandal-bearer was the herald; John knew he was heralding Christ's appearing, but he openly said he was not worthy to do this. He felt his insufficiency, as we ought to ours. Would we had that depth of awareness; for on the brink of the Lord's coming, we are in a remarkably similar position to John. Paul perhaps directs us back to John when he says that we are not "sufficient" to be the saviour of God to this world; and yet we are made sufficient to preach by God (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6 RV). To carry the master's sandals (Mt. 3:11) was, according to Vine, the work of the lowest slave. This was how John saw himself; and this is what witnessing for Jesus is all about, being the lowest slave and servant of the Lord of glory. It's interesting in this context to note how the Lord Jesus states that in some sense, John 'was Elijah', whereas he himself denies this (Mt. 11:14; 17:12; Mk. 9:13). Such was his humility.

"He shall baptize you" points up the contrast is between John baptizing unto repentance, and Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. The contrast is between 'repentance' and 'the Holy Spirit'. I suggest that the idea is that the gift of the Holy Spirit would empower repentance and new-mindedness far more than what was achieved by unaided, steel-willed human repentance.

3:17 *Whose fan is in his hand, to cleanse his threshing-floor thoroughly, and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire-* John says that the axe is laid to the root of the trees; his hearers were about to be cut down and thrown into the fire of condemnation. And He says that the Jesus whom he heralds is about to come and divide the wheat from the chaff in judgment, gathering in the wheat, and burning the chaff with "unquenchable fire" (Lk. 3:17). But the 'fire' of condemnation and the division of wheat and chaff is to be done

ultimately at the Lord's second coming (Mt. 13:30; Mk. 9:48). But for John, the moment his audience met Jesus, they were standing before the Lord of judgment, the Judge of all the earth. In their response to Him, they were living out the final judgment. And this is just as true of us, both as preachers and hearers of the Gospel.

"He (Jesus) shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit (even) with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and... he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11,12). John put a choice before them: fire, or fire. Either we are consumed with the fire of devotion to God, or we face the figurative fire of condemnation. This is the logic of judgment. John says that the axe is laid to the root of the trees; his hearers were about to be cut down and thrown into the fire of condemnation. And He says that the Jesus whom he heralds is about to come and divide the wheat from the chaff in judgment, gathering in the wheat, and burning the chaff with "unquenchable fire" (Lk. 3:17). But the 'fire' of condemnation and the division of wheat and chaff is to be done ultimately at the Lord's second coming (Mt. 13:30; Mk. 9:48). But for John, the moment his audience met Jesus, they were standing before the Lord of judgment, the Judge of all the earth. In their response to Him, they were living out the final judgment. And this is just as true of us, both as preachers and hearers of the Gospel. The message that the Lord will "burn with unquenchable fire" those who reject Him is described as preaching "good tidings unto the people" (Lk. 3:18 RV). Likewise the stark teaching about the mortality of man in Is. 40 is quoted in 1 Pet. as being the Gospel. The harder side of God is in fact the good news for those who reflect deeply upon the essential message and nature of the Almighty. In Jer. 26:2, Jeremiah is warned to "diminish not a word, if so be..." Israel may repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn't have any chance of eliciting a response.

*3:18 With many other appeals he preached good tidings to the people-*  
The need to repent is in fact good news. The message that the Lord will "burn with unquenchable fire" those who reject Him is described as Jesus preaching "good tidings unto the people" (Lk. 3:18 RV). Likewise the stark teaching about the mortality of man in Is. 40 is quoted in 1 Pet. as being the Gospel. The harder side of God is in fact the good news for those who reflect deeply upon the essential message and nature of the Almighty. In Jer. 26:2, Jeremiah is warned to "diminish not a word, if so be..." Israel may repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn't have any chance of eliciting a response.

3:19 *But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for marrying Herodias his brother's wife, and for all the evil things which Herod had done-* Josephus claims that she was in fact married to another relative, not Philip, before she married Herod (*Antiquities* 18:136). We can simply decide to trust the Biblical record over Josephus. Or it could be that Josephus refers to a previous relationship she had. See on Mt. 14:10 for another conflict with Josephus. John's example here raises the question of whether we should protest immoral behaviour in society. It could be argued that Herod claimed to be Jewish and therefore responsible to Divine law.

The laws of Lev. 18:16; 20:21 were applicable to Jews; which opens the wider question as to whether we ought to be drawing the attention of the world to their disobedience to Biblical principles, even though they do not claim any faith in the Bible. Criticizing others' ways of living leads to anger if the point isn't accepted; and we have a classic case of it here. The Herods were from Idumea, but although they weren't ethnic Jews, they claimed to be religious Jews. So it could be that John's attitude was that if someone considered themselves as being under God's law, then they should be obedient to it and were therefore culpable before Him for disobedience to it. In this case, we do not actually have here any reason to think that a Christian's duty is to lobby the unbelieving world leaders to be obedient to God's law.

3:20 *Also added this, that he locked John up in prison-* Even with very sinful men, their continual sins still register in the feelings of God. The way God progressively senses the weight of accumulated sin is reflected in His description of the Amorites' iniquity filling up (Gen. 15:16); or Israel marrying Gentiles "to increase the trespass of Israel" (Ezra 10:10). "The iniquity of Israel is bound up, his sin is kept in store" (Hos. 13:12). God sees some wicked men as more wicked than others; for He is sensitive to every one of their sins (e.g. 2 Kings 17:2). "For three transgressions and for four" of Israel or the Gentiles, God would still punish Jew and Gentile alike (Am. 1,2)- i.e. He still feels the fourth sin, He doesn't become insensitive after the third sin. And this doesn't only apply to His people; but to all sin, committed by anyone, anywhere. Thus Herod "added yet this above all" when he imprisoned John after also sinning with another man's wife. We have an uncanny ability to become numb to sin the more we see or do it. But not so Almighty, all righteous God. This is a feature of His nature that needs meditation.

3:21 *Now it came to pass, when all the people were baptized, that Jesus also having been baptized and praying, the heaven was opened-* The Lord's baptism was in his case not for forgiveness, but as a sign of identity with "all the people". And Luke in his words here recognizes that. Sometimes God indicates from what perspective the record is written; at other times He doesn't. Thus Matthew 3:16 makes it clear that the Lord

saw Heaven opened at his baptism, and the Spirit descending like a dove. But Luke 3:21-22 just says that "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended". Luke doesn't say that this is only what happened from the Lord's perspective. This problem of perspective is at the root of the misunderstanding of the demon language in the Gospels.

*3:22 And the Holy Spirit descended upon him in a bodily form as a dove, and a voice came out of heaven: You are My beloved Son- Surely an allusion to Gen. 22:2 (LXX), where the sacrificed Isaac was Abraham's beloved son.*

*In you I am well pleased-* Combining references to Ps. 2:7 and Is. 42:1. Klausner: "In whom I shall be blessed". Quoted about the Lord also in Mt. 12:18; 17:5. The contrast is with how the Father was not "well pleased" with Israel when they were in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:5); but He was well pleased with His Son in the wilderness. Many prophecies about Israel, the 'servant' of Isaiah's prophecies, come true in Jesus. God's plan in Israel failed due to their disobedience, but the intention behind it came true in Jesus; He was the Son who fulfilled the Father's wishes after Israel failed Him. Jesus thus became the embodiment of Israel; He was their representative before God. It is in this context that the representative nature of the Lord Jesus was first established; He was God's Son who was fully representative of Israel. It is thereby through Him that Israel can be finally restored to their Father. See on 2 Pet. 1:17. The voice had the same intonation as the voice on the mount of transfiguration; it was the voice of God Himself in person. The Father's 'pleasure' spoke also of His 'will'. His will was done, and His pleasure thereby achieved, "in" His Son; because of the Lord's internal state of mind. And this sets the path toward understanding our own status "in Christ".

*3:23 And Jesus, when he began to teach, was about thirty years of age-* Thirty was the age at which priests began to minister; and yet Luke connects this with the Lord's beginning to teach. For the duty of priests was to teach.

*Being the son (as was legally reckoned) of Joseph, the son of Heli-* See on Lk. 2:49. The genealogies focus upon Joseph because Mary has already been stated to be the descendant of David, in his direct line. Giving the genealogies of Joseph is however a kind of concession to human weakness in not accepting genealogies through the mother; for Joseph was of course not the Lord's biological father. But even he could be traced as the rightful inheritor of Israel's throne had there been a monarchy at the time of Jesus. Jesus was his adopted son; he was "as was supposed", or 'as was reckoned by law', the son of Joseph. And the genealogy is included for the sake of those who reckoned by law. And yet the record in Luke appears to effectively be that of Mary; Joseph being "the son of Heli" was probably by reason of marrying Mary, the daughter of Heli; the

Talmud speaks with gross vitriolic about Mary the daughter of Heli going to hell for her blasphemy, referring to Mary the mother of Jesus. This shows that the Jews accept that Mary was the daughter of Heli. Heli's father was Matthat, who can be equated with Matthan the grandfather of Joseph. Thus Mary and Joseph were cousins (hinting at an arranged marriage?), and therefore Jesus was a son of David through both his mother and father by adoption. In the light of this it is evident that the question mark over the validity of a genealogy through Joseph is an irrelevancy, seeing that Joseph and Mary had a common grandfather. The point has to be made that a humanly fabricated genealogy would be sure to make some glaring errors, especially if it was produced by simple, uneducated men as the Jews claim the New Testament was. The wonder of the New Testament genealogies is that closer study reveals ever more intricate internal evidence for their truth and reliability, rather than exposing more problems.

The Talmud (*Treatise Bava Bathra*, 110a) claims that Mary the mother of Jesus was called the daughter of Heli. In this case we would then effectively have here the genealogy of Mary; and this is rather confirmed by the fact that Matthew's genealogy gives a man called Jacob as the Lord's grandfather, whereas Luke gives "Heli". Both can be correct, if one [i.e. Luke] is the genealogy of Mary as it were attached to Joseph, the "supposed" father of Jesus.

3:24 *The son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph-* This "Jannai" is identified by Philo with Hyrcanus the second, who reigned sixteen years.

3:25 *The son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai-* These are all identified by Philo as being kings during the period of the Maccabees.

3:26 *The son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda-* "Joda" or "Juda" is identified by Philo with Hyrcanus the first, in whom the kingly and priestly lines crossed, making him and his offspring 'king-priests'. This is how the Lord is portrayed, as a king who is also priest after the order of Melchizedek.

3:27 *The son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri-* Lk. 3:27 in some versions describes Zerubbabel as the head / chief / leader. The term Rhesa is incorrectly rendered in many versions as a name. Perhaps Luke's point was that the Lord Jesus was the final Messiah, after the failure of so many potential ones beforehand. 'Zerubbabel the chief' would then be a similar rubric to "David the king" in Matthew's genealogy (Mt. 1:16). It could be that Shealtiel adopted Zerubbabel.

3:28 *The son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er-* From verses 28 to 31 we have 20 names; Matthew for the same period has 14, demonstrating that the genealogies do not cover every generation; "son of" can mean grandson or descendant of. Those named are clearly for a purpose.

3:29 *The son of Jesus, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi-* The mention of a "Levi" could suggest that although this is the line through Judah, there was some intermarriage with the Levites; this made the Lord a king-priest, as required for the Messianic priest after the order of Melchizedek.

3:30 *The son of Symeon, the son of Judas, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim-* We read of a Levi in :29; now of a Simeon, Judah and Joseph. And yet this is the genealogy through Judah (:33). We can assume from these names that the tribes intermarried. This was far from ideal and was not God's intention; and yet all this was in the genetic pool and background of the Lord Jesus. Yet none of these factors make us inevitable sinners, and the Lord overcame them as we can.

3:31 *The son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David-* The line is traced not through Solomon but rather through Nathan, named perhaps after the prophet Nathan who had rebuked David, and whom he so respected that he names a son after Nathan. Yet Nathan openly rebuked David for what he had done with Uriah and Bathsheba. This in the end led to deep respect.

3:32 *The son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon-* Boaz was unashamed to marry Ruth the Moabitess and raise up his seed to his relative, meaning that his inheritance would have to be further divided. This was at a time when the fields were split up into strips, as we also learn from the book of Ruth, and further subdividing the strips made farming difficult and unprofitable. The nameless relative who was closer to Ruth than Boaz refused to marry her because he didn't want to spoil the inheritance he was going to hand over to his existing children. And yet he who was so concerned about secular things and the good continuance of his name- found himself anonymous in the final account. It was Boaz, the one prepared to have more children and further subdivide his inheritance, who goes down in history as an ancestor of the Lord.

3:33 *The son of Amminadab, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah-* Perez was born by the strange and immoral set of events recorded in Genesis 38, whereby Judah's daughter in law Tamar acted as a prostitute to seduce Judah to get her pregnant- and Perez was the result. So often it seems that pre-existing background,

family and genetic issues all set up a person for spiritual failure. One lesson of these genealogies is that sin is not inevitable. The Lord Jesus had all this, and far more, in His ancestry- and yet He never sinned. We are a new creation in Him.

3:34 *The son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor-* This is a clear statement that the Lord was indeed the promised seed of the Jewish fathers. His humanity was critically important to the fulfilment of those promises.

3:35 *The son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah-* "Eber" has been suggested as the first occurrence of "Hebrew". The Lord is being presented as a well qualified Jew, despite the admixture of Gentile blood at many points. We note that it is Matthew, writing to Jews, who tends to mention the Gentile connections of the Lord's genealogy; whereas Luke, writing to Gentiles, doesn't emphasize them. Perhaps this was in order to demonstrate to them that indeed "salvation is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22); Gentile salvation was brought about by the Lord being Israel's Messiah and fulfilling the promises to the Jewish fathers.

3:36 *The son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech-* The apparent differences with the genealogy in Gen. 10:24; 11:12; 1 Chron. 1:24 are because Luke is following the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text. It is common for the New Testament writers to do this. We note that Shem's grandson was called Cainan; clearly there was intermarriage between the descendants of Noah, and the theory that different coloured human beings emerged from the three sons of Noah is simply fantasy.

3:37 *The son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan-* Luke is concerned with the facts of the genealogy; he could have done what people tend to do in presenting genealogies, and present the hero as continuing a prestigious line. Positive things could have been noted about Enoch and Methuselah, as we find when we read their histories in Genesis; but there is not a word about this. The great truth presented is that the Lord is truly the seed of Abraham and David, and really had our nature and connection with us all.

3:38 *The son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God-* The Roman emperors and Greek heroes sometimes traced their pedigree back to a god- and therefore the genealogies of Jesus we find in Matthew and Luke were quite radical in this regard. For they traced the pedigree of Jesus back to God- as if He were the emperor. This would have made this

gospel record forbidden literature at some periods of the Roman empire and emperor cult.

## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness-* The Lord Jesus was led of the Spirit at His time of testing; and Paul uses just those words of us in our present experience of trial (Rom. 8:14). His victory in the wilderness therefore becomes a living inspiration for us, who are tempted as He was (Heb. 4:15,16). Note how Mark speaks of Jesus being 'driven' at this time. Being driven by circumstances can be a form of leading- it just depends which perspective we have.

4:2 *Being tempted by the Devil for forty days. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were completed, he was hungry-* Commentary on what this passage does *not* mean can be found in my [The Real Devil](#).

The only other two men recorded as doing this are Moses and Elijah (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8). The Lord chose to seek to enter into their experience; it was presumably His decision to fast for this period. And the Father responded to that by giving Him the encouraging vision of those same two men at the transfiguration. We see here how God is in dialogue with man; if we wish to identify with some Bible character, the Father will respond His side to enable us to do so yet more.

With His familiarity with Scripture, Christ would have seen the similarities between Himself and Elijah, whose morale collapsed after 40 days in the wilderness (1 Kings 19: 8) and Moses, who forfeited his immediate inheritance of the land at the end of 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus at the end of 40 days, was in a similar position to them - faced with a real possibility of failure. Moses and Elijah failed because of human weakness - not because of a person called "the devil". It was this same human weakness, the "Satan", or adversary, that was tempting Jesus.

The temptations were controlled by God for the Lord's spiritual education. The passages quoted by the Lord to strengthen Himself against His desires ("devil") are all from the same part of Deuteronomy, regarding Israel's experience in the wilderness. Jesus clearly saw a parallel between His experiences and theirs:

Deuteronomy 8:2 "The Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments (word), or no."	Matthew 4 / Luke 4 "Jesus led up of the spirit" "forty days" "in the wilderness". Jesus was proved by the temptations. Jesus overcame by quoting the Scriptures that were in His heart (Ps. 119:11), thus showing it was the Scriptures that were in His heart.
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Deuteronomy 8:3. "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word...of the Lord..."	"He was afterward an hungered". In John 6 manna is interpreted by Jesus as representing the Word of God, which Jesus lived by in the wilderness. Jesus learnt that spiritually He lived by the Word of God. "He answered...it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word ...of God".,
Deuteronomy 8:5 "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee"	Jesus no doubt reflected on His experiences. God chastened His Son, Jesus- 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89: 32.

Thus the Lord showed us how to read and study the Word - He thought Himself into the position of Israel in the wilderness, and therefore took the lessons that can be learnt from their experiences to Himself in His wilderness trials. The description of the Lord Jesus as being in the wilderness with beasts and Angels (Mk. 1:13) is another connection with Israel's experience in the wilderness- they were plagued there by "wild beasts" because of their disobedience (Dt. 32:19-24 and context).

4:3 *And the Devil said to him: If you are the Son of God, command these stones that they become bread-* The first temptation- to turn stones into bread- would not in itself have been a sin if He had agreed to it. But it would have been choosing a lower level, by breaking His fast. But the next temptations were to actually sin. If He had agreed to the first suggestion, obedience to the next ones would have been harder. It could even be argued that to put the Lord to the test was permissible on a lower level- for passages like Ps. 34:8 and Mal. 3:10 almost encourage it for those with a weak faith. Gideon likewise put the Lord to the test and was answered. But the Lord chose the higher level: and He knew Scripture which could support it. But the fact He chose the highest level first of all, meant that He was better able to take the higher level again, and to finally overcome the third temptation, which was definitely a clear choice between right and wrong. More than this, anything other than a desire to make the highest maximum commitment can lead to failure. "The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left" (Ecc. 10:2 NIV) has been understood as referring not so much to right and wrong, good and evil, as to the highest good and lesser good (cp. how the left hand can stand for simply lesser blessing rather than outright evil, e.g. Gen. 48:13-20). The fool inclines to lower commitment. The wise will always incline to the maximum, wholehearted level.

It's perhaps noteworthy that in the wilderness temptation, the Lord responds to the "If you are the Son of *God*..." by quoting Dt. 8:3

"*man* shall not live by bread alone"- and the Jonathan Targum has *bar nasha* [son of man] here for "man". If we are correct in understanding those wilderness temptations as the Lord's internal struggles, we see Him tempted to wrongly focus upon His being Son of *God*, forgetting His humanity; and we see Him overcoming this temptation, preferring instead to perceive Himself as Son of *man*. The *if... then* structure here (a 'first class conditional') effectively means 'Because...' (See Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2012) p. 83). In this case, we are clearly being given an insight into the internal thinking of the Lord Jesus. 'Because You are Son of God, why not...'. A truly human Jesus would inevitably have had such thoughts, and the record here makes that clear. Seeing that Mary appears to have become somewhat influenced by the surrounding view of Jesus as her illegitimate son, it's likely the Lord too had moments when He wondered whether this could all be true- whether He really was God's Son.

4:4 *And Jesus answered him: It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone-* The Lord overcame all His temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy, showing that His mind was seeking strength from the words of the Angel leading Israel through the wilderness. There are clear similarities between the Angel's leading of Israel through the wilderness and the Lord's experience in the wilderness:

**Deuteronomy 8**

v. 2 "The Lord your God [an Angel] led you... in the wilderness"  
 Forty years in the wilderness  
 v. 3 "He (the Angel who led them in v. 2) suffered you to hunger".  
 The Angel "fed you with manna" (Ps. 78:25)  
 "Man does not live by bread alone"

**Luke 4**

v. 1 Jesus led by the spirit (an Angel?) into the wilderness.  
 Forty days in the wilderness  
 The Angel made Jesus hunger.  
 Jesus was tempted to ask the Angel to provide bread as He did to Israel in their testing.  
 v. 4 "Man does not live by bread alone"

Thus the Lord Jesus surveyed His own experience in the wilderness, and saw that He could take to Himself personally the lessons given to Israel. The Angel led Israel through the wilderness "to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no" (Dt. 8:2). God Himself knows anyway, so this must be regarding the Angel, seeking to know the spiritual strength of Israel, as Job's Satan Angel sought to know Job's strength. Similarly, the Lord's Angel led Him

into the wilderness, suffering Him to hunger, to humble and prove Him, to reveal His real attitude to the word of God. His quoting of the word to answer the temptations surely proved this to the Angel, especially since the Lord showed Himself so capable of thinking Himself into Scripture, and therefore taking the lessons most powerfully to Himself. The Lord was made to realize the importance of His memory of the word, as He would have later reflected that this was the only way He had overcome- that man spiritually lives by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". As a result of their wilderness temptations, both Israel and Christ were led to "consider in (their) heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God (the Angel) chasteneth thee". The chastenings of the Lord spiritually in the wilderness were therefore arranged by the Angels. There did not have to be Angels actually tempting Christ in the wilderness temptations- because they can act directly on a man's heart, they can lead us into temptation. The fact we pray for Him not to implies that He does- through the Angels, as He Himself tempts no man (James 1:13), although the Angels tempted Abraham, and Israel among others. Thus the Angels may arrange an external stimulus, e. g. the fruit of the tree of knowledge, knowing it must produce certain internal desires within us which tempt us. Note how the temptation to throw Himself off the top of the temple was a temptation to misuse Angelic care. He answered it by a quotation which has an Angelic context: "You (Jesus) shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah" (Dt. 6:16). At Massah the Israelites put the Angel to the test by questioning whether He could provide water (Ex. 17:2-7).

*4:5 And he led him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time-* This was surely a vision or imagination of the Kingdom, when "the kingdoms of this world" becomes those of the Lord Jesus. It can hardly be that a fiendish being took the Lord Jesus literally up the highest mountain (Everest) from where He could see all the world. Nor would being up a tall mountain enable the Lord to see "the glory of them". Surely a non-literal event is implied here- within the Lord's mind.

The temptations are hard to take literally:

- Matthew 4:8 implies that Jesus was led up into a high mountain to see all the kingdoms of the world in their future glory, "In a moment of time". There is no mountain high enough to see all the world. And why would the height of the mountain enable Jesus to see what the world would be like in the future? The earth, being a sphere, there is no point on its surface from which one can see all the parts of the world at one time.

- A comparison of Matthew 4 and Luke 4 shows that the temptations are described in a different order. Mark 1:13 says that Jesus was "in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan", whilst Matthew 4:2,3 says that "when he had fasted forty days... the tempter (Satan) came to Him...". Because Scripture cannot contradict itself, we can conclude that these

same temptations kept repeating themselves. The temptation to turn stones into bread is an obvious example. This would fit nicely if these temptations occurred within the mind of Jesus. Being of our nature, the lack of food would have affected him mentally as well as physically, and thus his mind would have easily begun to imagine things. Just going a few days without food can lead to delirium for some (cp. 1 Sam. 30:12). The similarity between rolls of bread and stones is mentioned by Jesus in Mt. 7: 9, and doubtless those images often merged in his tortured mind - although always to be brought into swift control by his recollection of the Word

- Jesus probably told the Gospel writers the record of His temptations, and to bring home in words the intensity of what He underwent, He could have used the figurative approach seen in Matthew 4 and Luke 4.

- It seems unlikely that several times the devil led Jesus through the wilderness and streets of Jerusalem and then scaled a pinnacle of the temple together, all in view of the inquisitive Jews. Josephus makes no record of anything like this happening - presumably it would have caused a major stir. Similarly, if these temptations occurred several times within the forty days as well as at the end of that period (which they did at least twice, seeing that Matthew and Luke have them in different order), how would Jesus have had time to walk to the nearest high mountain (which could have been Hermon in the far north of Israel), climb to the top and back down again, return to the wilderness and then repeat the exercise? His temptations all occurred in the wilderness - He was there for forty days, tempted all the time by the devil (he only departed at the end). If Jesus was tempted by the devil each day, and the temptations occurred only in the wilderness, then it follows that Jesus could not have left the wilderness to go to Jerusalem or travel to a high mountain. These things therefore could not have literally happened.

*4:6 And the Devil said to him: To you will I give all this authority and the glory of them. For it has been delivered to me, and to whomsoever I will, I give it-* The Lord knew full well that "all things" (Mt.), the Kingdom of God when the kingdoms of this world have been subsumed beneath it, could only be given to Him to God. He was tempted to play God, to assume that by His own action He could grasp it for Himself without the cross. It is perhaps to this that Paul alludes when he writes that the Lord did not consider such equality with God a thing to be even grasped after (Phil. 2:6). Again we see how the essence of the wilderness temptations returned to the Lord on the cross. For Phil. 2:6 specifically speaks of the Lord in His time of dying.

*4:7 Therefore, if you will worship me, it shall all be yours-* All the kingdoms of the world will indeed be the Lord's. This was the subtlety of

the temptation. The question was when and how that was to be achieved. The Lord knew that the cross must come before that crown. But the temptation would have been to try to circumvent that, and this is portrayed as falling down and worshipping self.

*4:8 And Jesus answered and said to him: It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve-* The record of the Lord's wilderness temptations is almost certainly a reflection of *His* self-perception; He spoke to the 'devil' / personification of sin which was within Him, He saw Himself as two people, and His spiritual man triumphed gloriously against the man of the flesh. He understood that we can only serve two masters: God or the flesh ("mammon" is another personification of the flesh, similar to 'satan'). He saw His own flesh, His own internal thoughts, as a master begging to be served which He must totally reject. His words are a quotation from Dt. 6:13, which warns Israel to serve Yahweh alone and not idols. He perceived His own natural mind and desire as an idol calling to be served. When the Lord explained what had happened in the wilderness to the disciples and thereby to the Gospel writers, He opened His heart to them. He gave us all a window on how He perceived Himself, as He sought to explain to men the internal struggles of the Son of God. Bringing it all back home, I must ask firstly how much we even *struggle* with temptation? And as and when we do, would we not be helped by the Lord's example of talking to ourselves, and personalizing Scripture as He did? 'You don't want to do *that!* Give up your place in the Kingdom, for that... drug, that girl, that job? Of course not! Come on. There *is* a way of escape; Paul told me God won't try me beyond my strength, He will make me a way of escape'.

*4:9 And he led him to Jerusalem, set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him: If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here-* The idea may well be that He was imagining being received into rulership of the Messianic Kingdom, and was wondering whether that would be possible through accepting 'the devil', be it His own flesh or the Jewish system, who humanly speaking seemed able to offer a path to this. Likewise 'set him' in Mt. 4:5 carries the idea of being appointed, established in authority.

*4:10 For it is written: He shall give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you-* The Angels were given "charge concerning thee" (Jesus)- in the court of Heaven, God's purpose was declared and His charge made clear concerning His Son (Lk. 4:10 RVmg.).

Presumably this was to be taken literally- the Angels physically with Him would have literally held Him under the arms if He jumped from the temple. So we see the literal physical presence of the Angels in our lives. The eyes of God, an evident reference to the Angels, are associated with

the temple (1 Kings 8:29; Ps. 11:4; Ps. 5:6-8). The implication surely is that the Angel[s] specifically functioned in the temple / sanctuary. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen.

The 'devil' of the Lord's own thoughts tempted Him to apply Ps. 91:11 in a wrong context, and jump off the pinnacle of the temple. But if the Lord had gone on, as surely He did, He would have found the words: "You shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shall you trample under feet" (Ps. 91:13). This promise would have been of wonderful comfort, as throughout the wilderness temptations the Lord "was with the wild beasts" (Mk. 1:13).

*4:11 And on their hands they shall carry you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone-* Presumably this was to be taken literally- the Angels physically with Him would have literally held Him under the arms if He jumped from the temple. So we see the literal physical presence of the Angels in our lives. The eyes of God, an evident reference to the Angels, are associated with the temple (1 Kings 8:29; Ps. 11:4; Ps. 5:6-8). The implication surely is that the Angel[s] specifically functioned in the temple / sanctuary. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen (Gen. 18:10).

*4:12 And Jesus answering said to him: It is said, you shall not test the Lord your God-* The Greek in Matthew effectively means 'On the other hand, it is also written...'. The Lord Jesus did not try to reconcile the two verses, He accepted them as part of a dialectic whereby this verse says that but this verse says this- which is typical Hebrew reasoning. Geek reasoning would seek to explain that this verse says this, but that is qualified by this other verse, so the truth is a mixture between the two verses. The Hebrew style of reasoning leaves apparent contradictions to the Western, Greek reasoning mind. But they are not this at all, just dialectical style.

*4:13 And when the Devil had completed every temptation, he departed from him for a time-* The essence of all the temptations returned to the Lord, particularly in Gethsemane and on the cross. Every time we discern them returning, they are at the hands of the Jews- to become king immediately in Jn. 6, to come down from the cross. Which leads us to perceive that the 'devil' in the wilderness may have been manifested through the Jewish satan; the idea of the Jewish system as the great satan or adversary to the Lord and His later work is continued throughout

the New Testament.

4:14 *And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and the news about him went out throughout all the region-* This was no glorious entry into Galilee; He withdrew into Galilee (Mt. 4:12) after cleansing the temple (Jn. 2:13-22), taking the imprisonment of John as the sign to begin His ministry. He felt He was withdrawing, heavy in spirit at the loss of John the Baptist to prison, but in the eyes of the world, it was a triumphal entry (:15). "The power of the Spirit" may mean that He began doing miracles, thus accounting for news of Him spreading like wildfire, or simply that He was propelled by the leadership of the Spirit as we can be today.

4:15 *And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all-* The entry to Galilee could be that of Jn. 4:43, meaning that by this stage He had already turned water into wine at Cana (Jn. 2). The miracles had begun, but the 'glorifying' of Jesus is presented as in connection with His teaching rather than His miracles. This is an important theme- that His teaching was far more significant than His miracles. And that teaching we have recorded for us. It ought to elicit the same desire to glorify Him.

4:16 *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read-* This suggests He had been a regular synagogue attender and reader, but somehow this time, as He read the Messianic prophecies, it was clear that He was the word made flesh. He was the One. He must have previously somehow contained the fact He was the Messiah, living His life of perfect obedience in a somehow obscured manner. Now, He let down the mask and revealed Himself for who He was.

4:17 *And there was delivered to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written-* The record is as it were of a video capture, focusing on every detail of His body language- He stood up to read (:16), the scroll was delivered into His hands, He opened it and He found the place in the scroll. All this is to present in more visual form what John states more enigmatically- the word was made flesh.

Although the Greek *euangelion* is not used, the LXX of Is. 40:9; 52:7 and 60:1,2 clearly envisage a Messianic figure proclaiming the "good news" of Israel's freedom from oppression and sin. The Lord seems to assume that His audience would know what 'good news' He had in view. Perhaps He was alluding to those Servant Songs in Isaiah, and saying that the good news is of "the Kingdom of God". And He goes on in Matthew particularly to explain that this good news is of the life of forgiveness and grace lived

out now, under the rulership of God, and coming to its material climax in His second coming and the literal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

4:18 *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that are bruised-* The Lord began His ministry by proclaiming a freedom from burdens through Him (Lk. 4). And He concludes it by telling the disciples to proclaim the same deliverance (Lk. 24:47). Consider how He brings together various passages from Isaiah in His opening declaration in Lk. 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach [proclaim] [Heb. 'call out to a man'] the acceptable year of the Lord". This combines allusions to Is. 61:1 (Lev. 25:10); Is. 58:6 LXX and Is. 61:2.

Is. 58:6 AV: "To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free (cp. Dt. 15:12 re freedom of slaves, s.w.), and that you break every yoke" is in the context of an insincerely kept year of Jubilee in Hezekiah's time, after the Sennacherib invasion. Is. 58 has many Day of Atonement allusions- the year of Jubilee began on this feast. We are as the High Priest declaring the reality of forgiveness to the crowd. Hence Lk. 24:47 asks us to proclaim a Jubilee of atonement. The Greek for "preach" in Lk. 24:47 and for "preach / proclaim the acceptable year" in Lk. 4:19 are the same, and the word is used in the LXX for proclaiming the Jubilee. And the LXX word used for 'jubilee' means remission, release, forgiveness, and it is the word used to describe our preaching / proclaiming forgiveness in Lk. 24:47. It could be that we are to see the cross as the day of atonement, and from then on the Jubilee should be proclaimed in the lives of those who accept it. It's as if we are running round telling people that their mortgages have been cancelled, hire purchase payments written off...and yet we are treated as telling them something unreal, when it is in fact so real and pertinent to them. And the very fact that *Yahweh* has released others means that we likewise ought to live in a spirit of releasing others from their debts to us: "The creditor shall release that which he hath lent... *because* the Lord's release hath been proclaimed" (Dt. 15:2 RV).

Isaiah 61 was the Jewish synagogue reading for the Day of Atonement and especially on the first day of a jubilee year, and it could be that the Lord is alluding to this when He said that "today" those words were coming true. Perhaps that day was a day of atonement. He was the means for atonement, on which basis the Jubilee was proclaimed; the good news of Messiah was not so much a political kingdom free from the Romans, but the good news of atonement for sin.

Christ means 'Messiah', the anointed one. He was anointed in order "to preach the Gospel"; and we too have been anointed insofar as we are in Christ, the anointed one (2 Cor. 1:21). Therefore as He was ordained a preacher of the Gospel to the world, we too share that honour (as we do all His honours, to some extent). He was anointed ('oiled') by God in order to give the oil of joy to His people; He shared His experience of anointing with us, and we must go out and do likewise (Is. 61:1,2 cp. Lk. 4:18).

4:19 *To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord-* See on :18. To preach **[proclaim]** the **acceptable year** of the Lord (Lk. 4:19) is thus parallel with "You shall **proclaim** liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (Lev. 25:10). Likewise there are to be found other such allusions to the proclamation of Jubilee: "We as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive... the grace of God... a time accepted... in the day of salvation [the Jubilee] have I succoured you: behold, now is the **accepted time**" (2 Cor. 6:1,2) "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached **[proclaimed]**, s.w. 4:19] in his name among all nations" (Lk. 24:47).

4:20 *And he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him-* "The word was made flesh" in daily reality for Jesus. The extraordinary connection between the man Jesus and the word of God which He preached and spoke is reflected here, as noted on :17. Here we have as it were an exquisite close up of Jesus, His very body movements, His handling of the scroll, and the movement of the congregation's eyes. Notice that at this stage He had only read from the scroll, and not yet begun His exposition of what He had read. The impression I take from this is that there was an uncanny connection between Him and the word of His Father. The Son reading His Father's word, with a personality totally in conformity to it, must have been quite something to behold. He was the word of God made flesh in a person, in a way no other person had or could ever be. See on Lk. 4:36; Jn. 14:10.

4:21 *And he began to say to them: Today has this scripture been fulfilled in your hearing-* It was fulfilled "today" in that it was on that day that He chose to remove the mask He had worn before His neighbours, and reveal Himself for who He was- the Messiah.

Some prophecies are fulfilled according to the acceptance of their fulfilment by believers, and therefore have their fulfilments in different ways at different times. Thus for those who received it, Malachi's 'Elijah' prophecies were fulfilled in John the Baptist, for those who accepted him (Mt. 11:14). The implication is that for those who didn't, those prophecies weren't fulfilled. He didn't mean that His reading those words in a synagogue had fulfilled them. He speaks of "your ears" or "hearing" as

standing for 'your correct perception / understanding' in Mt. 13:16. What He was surely saying was that for those of them who perceived who He was, Isaiah's words were ringing true. For those who rejected Him, of course, they weren't fulfilled, and therefore their complete, universal acceptance / fulfilment would be delayed until a future day; just as it was with the 'Elijah' prophecy.

*4:22 And all bore him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said-* Because of the gracious words and manner of speaking of Jesus, therefore God so highly exalted Him (Ps. 45:2). The Father was so impressed with the words of His Son. Lk. 4:22 records how people were amazed at the gracious words He spoke, as in Jn. 7:46; there was something very unusual in His manner of speaking. Evidently there must have been something totally outstanding about His use of language. God highly exalted Him because He so loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Ps. 45:7), and yet also because of His manner of speaking (Ps. 45:2); so this *love* of righteousness and hatred of evil was what made His words so special.

*Is this not Joseph's son?-* Mary had clearly not shared with others what had happened around the Lord's conception. She had perhaps come to see Him as Joseph's son by the time she rebuked Him at age 12 in the temple, when she refers to Joseph as His father. She became influenced in her view of the Lord by the view of others. And we can take a warning from this. Such was His humanity that He appeared to have just followed the profession of His supposed 'father' on earth. In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person.

One of the most surpassing wonders of the Lord's character was that He could live for 30 years in a small town in Galilee, never ever committing sin, and never ever omitting an act of righteousness... and yet when He stood up and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah, the people were scandalized. They were shocked that this carpenter's son should think He was anything much more than them. Yet whenever we try to be a bit more righteous than our fellows, it's always noticed and held against us. Yet the Lord Jesus was both perfect, and also in favour with men. He came over as the ordinary guy, and yet He was perfect, and the light of this world. In this there is a matchless example for us. This wondrous feature of the Lord's achievement in His own character is reflected by the way His own brothers, who knew Him better than any, perceived Him to be just an ordinary person. When He started implying that He was the Son of God, they thought He'd gone crazy. When He declared Himself as

Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized. He was so human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation.

*4:23 And he said to them: Doubtless you will say to me this proverb: Physician, heal yourself. Whatever we have heard done at Capernaum, do also here in your hometown-* The nobleman's son had been cured in Capernaum, as recorded in John. "Heal yourself" could suggest the Lord had some illness or physical weakness. The language of Isaiah 53 is full of allusion to leprosy. He may have had the appearance of leprosy, some skin condition, whilst not having leprosy itself. This would speak much of the Lord's relationship with sin.

*4:24 And he said: Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own hometown-* We need to ask *why* this is so true. In the first century Palestinian world, a person wasn't defined so much by 'who they were' as by 'whom they belonged to and where they originated from'. Hence their problem with seeing that the Lord had access to wisdom and power which they did not have as a group. He didn't get that from them- and this confused them and their lack of understanding it turned to anger with Him. He had become different to them, therefore He was not of them- so they reasoned. And yet He *was* of them- the record stresses that they were His natural *patris*("country") and *oikos* ("family"). This is the same problem as Trinitarians have- they can't see that the Lord could have what He had, and yet be one of us, of our human nature. And perhaps that partly explains their frequently observed anger with non-Trinitarian Christians. This proverb is quoted again in Jn. 4:44 but in a different sense. The Lord is recorded as leaving Judea and going to Galilee exactly because a prophet has no honour in "His own country". Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, not in Galilee. It could be that He went to Galilee from Judea because the "country" He had in mind here in quoting this proverb was Bethlehem, rather than Nazareth. And yet in Mt. 13:57 He uses this proverb about Nazareth. Perhaps this explains His deep amazement at His rejection now in Nazareth- see on Mt. 13:58.

*4:25 But of a truth I say to you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land-* See on James 5:16-18. We only learn of the length of the famine in the New Testament. Three and a half years is a period we often meet in the latter day prophecies- 1260 days, 42 months, a time, times [two times] and a half. This latter

day period is therefore flagged up as the time of the ministry of the latter day Elijah, as an appeal for Israel to repent.

*4:26 And to none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman that was a widow-* In the context of :27, the implication would be that this woman too was a Gentile. Even at the start of His ministry, the Lord stressed Gentile acceptance. This was not simply because He realized Israel would reject Him and the door thereby opened to the Gentiles; but because He understood that the good news of the Hope of Israel was in fact good news for the Gentile world if they embraced that hope.

*4:27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them were cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian-* When Naaman's maid asserted that Elisha could cure him of his leprosy, this was not therefore based on experience. She had not even heard of Elisha curing any lepers in Israel. But she believed it was the kind of thing he could do.

*4:28 And they were all filled with anger in the synagogue as they heard these things-* There is a similar account in Mt. 13:55-58. If this is indeed a later, similar incident, then we marvel at how despite this rejection, the Lord later returned to give them another chance- and was treated likewise. Anger is demonstrated here to be rooted in a bad conscience. They realized the truth of who He was, but refused to accept it. And this leads to anger. Much human anger, although not all of it, is rooted in such bad conscience. And the anger is directed at the one[s] whose words have been rejected.

*4:29 And they rose up and threw him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong-* This was the punishment for a heretic. They knew He said the truth, but because it demanded so much of them, they claimed He was heretical. So many cries of 'heresy' and 'heretic' are psychologically rooted in a subconscious refusal to accept the truths presented. I suggest this is why there has been such a long tradition of hatred, anger and calling of 'heretic' against those who preach a non-Trinitarian Jesus. If He truly had our nature and therefore was not God, this demands so much of us. And men shy away from that and cry 'heresy' rather than be challenged as to what are the very high possibilities for we who share the nature the Lord had when mortal.

There may be an allusion here to Jephthah, who had been "despised and rejected of men" during the time of Israel's suffering. In this and many other ways he is a clear type of Christ. Jephthah reminded the "elders of Gilead" who were now seeking his help, "Did not you hate me, and expel me out of my father's house?" (Jud. 11:7). The Hebrew for "expel" is also

translated 'thrust out'; Jesus was 'thrust out' from his native town as Jephthah was from Gilead, perhaps a technical term for local excommunication from the city synagogue region. It was "the elders" who were also responsible for Christ's rejection. He was despised as "the son of a strange woman" (Jud. 11:2) as the Lord was accused of being born out of wedlock (Jn. 8:41).

4:30 *But he passing through the midst of them went his way-* The Lord clearly had the ability to avoid capture and death. This explains why towards the end of His ministry He was not taken and killed earlier. He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:17,18). So we see highlighted the fact that He could have avoided the cross, but chose not to- the essence of His wilderness temptations.

4:31 *And he came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath day-* He had been there earlier (:23), and cured the nobleman's son there. But Luke is writing for Gentiles, and so he mentions where Capernaum was located.

4:32 *And they were astonished at his teaching; for his word was with authority-* The synagogue minister gave the lesson or sermon, but invited members of the congregation to contribute their thoughts. The Lord's message would therefore have been brief, but so powerful that it astonished people. The Gospel records twelve times record astonishment at the Lord's teaching. How could the passage of mere ideas from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew be so utterly astonishing, no matter how profound the content of the message? The Old Testament prophets likewise spoke God's word, but they were met with cynicism and mocking. Surely there was another factor which elicited such astonishment at His teaching, and I suggest it was in the way that His person was so perfectly congruent with the amazing ideas He was teaching. He was after all the word made flesh.

His authority was based upon something. And I suggest it was not His miracles, but rather the congruence between His person and His word. The scribes indeed claimed authority. But the teaching of Jesus somehow had that authority within itself. It was not therefore just the nature or profundity of the ideas and content itself which were authoritative. He really did have authority, and He didn't need to make any claim to having it. The amazing challenge is in the parable of Mk. 13:34, where the Lord gives His authority to us His servants... We are not merely standing on a street lamely holding out tracts, offering them to anyone willing to come up and take one. We have an element of His authority if we are teaching His word in His Name; and thus Paul uses the word when speaking of his 'authority in the [preaching of] the Gospel' (1 Cor. 9:18; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; 2 Thess. 3:9). And in our personal standing before the Father, we likewise have been given authority by the Lord Jesus to be the sons of

God (Jn. 1:12). Paul realized we have each been given this authority, and uses the same word when warning believers not to let their "authority" (AV "this liberty of yours") cause others to stumble (1 Cor. 8:9).

4:33 *And in the synagogue, there was a man that had a spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice-* Notice that the man [singular] cried out in the plural ["us... we", :34], and then changes immediately back to the singular "I know you..." (:34). This is a classic case of schizophrenia- not literal demon possession.

4:34 *Leave us alone! What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are! The Holy One of God!*- See on :33. Notice the changes of pronouns from plural to singular. The supposedly spirit-possessed man was what we would call a man suffering from multiple personality disorder or a schizophrenic. Perhaps the dominant personality of the man was that which could say "I know who you are- the Holy One of God". "You Nazarene" may suggest this man had met the Lord previously, and was one of the few who during the Lord's carpenter years had perceived that He was God's Holy One. Despite his affliction, in his deepest heart and most fundamental personality, the mentally ill man perceived what few others did- that Jesus was the Son of God. The man's less dominant personalities feared condemnation and destruction from this Son of God, and wanted Him to leave. The dominant personality recognized Him as Son of God, and maybe we are to imagine him saying "I know who you are..." said in a totally different tone of voice, as if another person was speaking compared to the ones who feared condemnation and didn't want closer engagement with Jesus. That same struggle, in essence, goes on in the mind of every person as they come to Jesus; a desire to pull back before it gets too serious and risky, and yet another desire to accept Him for who He is, the saviour Son of God. The Lord's apparent exorcism of the other personalities therefore left the man with who he really was in his heart of confused hearts- a believer in Jesus as God's Holy Son.

4:35 *And Jesus rebuked him, saying: Hold your peace and come out of him. And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst, he came out of him, having done him no hurt-* If as suggested on :34, the man had multiple personalities, the Lord is rebuking the less dominant personality. He speaks of course in terms which the man would have related to- of demon possession. The language of "rebuke" is appropriate to rebuking a personality; for one could hardly "rebuke" a person for being mentally disturbed. That is not a moral issue.

This is recorded from the perspective of the onlooking crowd, with their beliefs and observations coloured by those beliefs. The video camera of the Gospel writer is as it were focused on them, and therefore the

language of demon possession is used. The Greek for "tearing" used in Mark at this point is literally 'to make gasp'. It is appropriate to an epileptic convulsion or fit. But these incidents are not the work of indwelling demons; for they can be managed by medication today. The convulsion is described in the language of the day, as if there was a struggle within the man, and then in the man's panting afterwards we are invited to imagine a spirit departing from him. There was no actual "unclean spirit" involved; the cure was of personality, as noted on :34, it was as if one of the man's less dominant personalities now left him. And that is the kind of healing which the Lord through the Spirit can work today.

*4:36 And amazement came upon all, and they spoke together, one with another, saying: What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out-* See on :32. We can see here one reason why the Lord 'went along' with their misunderstanding about evil spirits. They were left with the impression, within their albeit incorrect worldview, that His *teaching* had the power to change radically, and to cause a spirit or mindset to depart from a person permanently. They thereby perceived that His words had power; the ideas in His teaching were of themselves powerful.

*4:37 And there went a rumour concerning him into every place of the region round about-* "Rumour" is literally "a noise". The word about the Lord Jesus went to "every place", every isolated dwelling. The Lord clearly used an economy of miracle, but He did so initially in order to publicize His Messianic claims and above all, His message. For we have noted above that He was using the miracles to exemplify and back up His message.

*4:38 And he rose up from the synagogue and entered into the house of Simon. And Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever-* The Greek literally means 'to be on fire'. This is yet another example of phenomenological language. A high temperature was thought to be a sign that something was on fire within a person; that wrong idea is repeated without correction, just as the language of demons is. The simple point being made, time and again, is that however folk understood disease, the power of the Lord Jesus was so infinitely greater that whatever was supposed to be causing the illness effectively didn't exist.

*And they made request of him concerning her-* Mt. 8:14 says: "And when Jesus had entered Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying", as if the Lord noticed the problem and took the initiative to assist, rather than being asked to- although Luke says they did ask Him. But they asked for what He already had noticed and knew all about. Mk. 1:31 states that "they [told] Him about her" and He responded. Surely the overall picture

is that He did notice her need. But He waited to be asked before responding- not because He would not otherwise have responded, but because He wanted to pique the intensity of request and entreaty on their part. We sense the same spirit in how He appeared to be asleep on the sinking boat, and how He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus. And His apparent silence in our own lives is surely to provoke our prayerfulness and faith likewise.

*4:39 And he stood over her and rebuked the fever; and it left her-* Also the language of the day, because illness was understood as having to go somewhere when it was healed.

*And immediately she rose up and served them-* Her response to her healing was to serve the Lord and His people. This should be the underlying motive why we ask for healing and good health- so that we can serve. And our response to the Lord's touching of us can never be passive- it involves some level of active serving. Perhaps the use of *diakoneo* looks forward to the office and practice of women being deacons, ministers, in the early church. For the church of any age is to be an extension of the men and women who followed the Lord Jesus in Galilee. There was a Rabbinic prohibition of women serving men at table, so this is yet another instance of the Lord and His people being driven by their desire to respond to God's grace to breaking accepted social norms about gender.

*4:40 And when the sun was setting, they brought to him all that were sick with various diseases; and he laid his hands on everyone of them and healed them-* The healing had been done on a Sabbath, and so they only carried their sick to the Lord after sunset. We see here the power of religious tradition and fear of religious leaders and infringement of their traditions. There would have been urgently sick people, who needed healing as soon as possible. The people believed the Lord could heal them; but their fear of infringing Sabbath traditions was even greater. And we see the same in essence today.

*4:41 And demons also came out from many, crying out and saying: You are the Son of God!-* The "many" had "various diseases" (Mk. 1:34). The "various diseases" demonstrated His wide ranging power; for healers tended to specialize in specific diseases, claiming power over particular [supposed] demons. But the Lord could heal all kinds of diseases. The purpose of the healings was not simply to meet human need, but to elicit a belief in Him as "Son of God". His miracles were always to back up His preaching.

*But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ-* "Allow / permit" is the same word translated "send forth". The idea could simply be that the Lord didn't send out these converts as 'sent forth' missionary apostles. "The demons" are put for the [supposedly] 'demon possessed' people. The focus is ultimately upon the person and not upon whatever was thought to be possessing them. Note how it was the Egyptian people who were judged (Gen. 15:14); their idols ("gods") are used by metonymy to stand for those who believed in them. Likewise "demons" is sometimes put by metonymy for those who believed in them.

*4:42 Now when it was day, he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought him and came to him, and tried to keep him from leaving them-* We continually notice the Lord's dislike of melodrama and large crowds. He was used to sustained personal contact with the Father, and the pressure of the crowds would have been unbearable for Him. He loved solitude with God. Many of us can relate to Him in this, and He thereby to us. But He worked with the crowds exactly because He saw their need, He as it were came out of Himself for their sakes and for the sake of God's glory.

*4:43 But he said to them: I must preach the good tidings of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for this is why I was sent-* He did not want to be a mere miracle man. His focus was upon preaching the Kingdom, and so He departed rather than meet all the human need which He could have done. His approach ought to be programmatic for us; and too often the focus of our ministry has either been upon purely academic pushing of Biblical ideas at one extreme, or mere do-gooding for its own sake at the other.

Comparing with :19, the preaching of the Kingdom is made parallel to preaching the time of acceptance with God and forgiveness of sins *now* (2 Cor. 6:2). Rom. 14:17 seems to teach that the Kingdom of God is more about "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit", both now and eternally, than physical, tangible things. Christ's parables about the Kingdom don't speak of a political Kingdom, but rather about the relationship between God and the believer in the here and now. See on Acts 8:12.

*4:44 And he was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee-* As with Paul's ministry, the openness of the synagogues to visiting teachers was well used by the Lord. "Went about... teaching... preaching... healing" (Mt. 4:23) is just what we read of the Lord's followers doing in Acts. The preaching of the apostles (and of ourselves) continues the personal work of the Lord in whom they lived and moved, and therefore often Acts records the gospel preaching work in language lifted from Luke as well as the other Gospel records (e.g. Acts 4:2; 5:12-16 = Mt. 4:23).



## CHAPTER 5

5:1 *Now it came to pass, while the crowd pressed upon him and heard the word of God, that he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret-* As elsewhere in the Gospels, the Lord's focus is presented as being upon the disciples rather than upon the crowds. He sought to develop and teach a small body of serious converts rather than make mass conversions; the mass conversions were to be made by them, rather than Him personally. And Acts continues this theme.

5:2 *And he saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets-* The impression is that they were potentially ready to go 'fishing' for the Lord, but with His presence in the boat they were able to do it. "Fishermen" is literally, 'salty ones'. The Greek can equally mean 'sailors'. The Lord must have had this in mind when He said that they were "the salt of the earth" (Mt. 5:13). If we are likewise the salt of the earth in our influence upon others, we will find ourselves as the modern counterpart to those 'salty ones' who followed the Lord in His Galilee days.

5:3 *And he entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. And he sat down and taught the crowds out of the boat-* It was for all the world as if the boat belonged to the Lord. He was setting these men up to continue His preaching ministry. He sat in their place, so that they would take His place later. Teaching from a boat is in intended contrast with the idea that teaching could only take place within the synagogue. He surely would have been better standing up, so that His voice carried, and so that He could speak louder. But He "sat", as His style was, just as an adult gets down to the level of a child in order to talk with them.

5:4 *And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon: Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch-* The scene is purposefully repeated by the Lord after His resurrection. He wished them to see that He was the same essential Jesus both in His mortal life and also in His post resurrection glory. And the same Jesus who loved little children and so desperately wished human salvation is the same yesterday, today and for ever- including when we meet Him at judgment day. He had asked Peter to "put out" into shallow water, with Him in the boat teaching (:3 s.w.). Now He asks them to "put out" into deeper water, alone, without Him, to fish. This was an acted parable of how their calling was to share the Gospel with others as the Lord had done; His teaching was their fishing of men. Prior to His presence and entering of their lives, they could not have done this. But He was present on the shore. This is expressed in more abstract terms in Jn. 14-16, where the Comforter, the spirit of Jesus, is promised to all who will teach Him to others. He is with us just as really as He was in His mortal life. But they were to go fishing "for a catch", in the expectation of response. Our

witness too is not merely a witness for the sake of it, but is to be made in firm faith that there are fish / men out there to be caught. A "catch" is literally a 'bringing', the same word is used of how sick people were 'brought' to the Lord in 4:10. The drawing process depends partially upon our bringing of men into the Gospel net.

5:5 *And Simon answered and said: Master, we toiled all night and took nothing, but at your word I will let down the nets-* See on :4 and Jn. 21:7. Despite having toiled all night and caught nothing, Peter was able to subdue his natural wisdom, his sense of futility, and the sense of irritation and superiority which exists in the experienced working man: "Nevertheless ["but"] (how much that hides!) at *your word* I will let down the nets". It would seem that the parallel record of this is found in Mt. 4:18, which describes the call of the disciples soon after Christ's triumphant emergence from the wilderness temptations. We learn from Jn. 1:41,42 that it was Peter's brother, Andrew, who first told Peter about Jesus, and who brought him to meet Jesus first of all. The point is that at the time of Peter's call as he was fishing, he had probably heard very few of Christ's words personally. He had heard about Him, and listened to His words for perhaps a few hours at different times in the past. So where did he get this tremendous respect for the word of Christ from, which he demonstrated when Christ called him? The answer must be that he meditated deeply on those words that he had heard and understood, and came to appreciate that the man saying them was worth giving all for. Our far easier access to God's word does not seem to make us more meditative as individuals. We have access to hearing God's word which previous generations never had. We can listen to it on a Walkman, have tapes of well-read Scripture playing at home, analyse it by computer, hear it sung to us according to our taste in music, read it from pocket Bibles as we work and travel... we *can* and *could* do all these things. My sense is that we just don't make use of our opportunities as we should. Why has God given our generation these special opportunities to be ultra-familiar with His word? Surely it is because our age contains temptations which are simply more powerful than those of former years. So it is *vital*, vital for our eternal destiny, that we do make as much use as possible of all these opportunities. We should be *cramming*, yes *cramming*, our hearts and brains with the words of God. I certainly get the feeling that Peter would have listened to a tape of Isaiah on his Walkman if he had one, as he went out fishing; that he'd have had tapes of the Psalms going all evening long in his little fisherman's cottage, wife and kids caught up in his enthusiasm too (Mk. 10:10,15 suggests that the incident with the little children occurred in Peter's house). There *are* a handful of Christian homes where this spirit is truly seen.

It seems to me that the Lord asks each of us to do that which is

essentially difficult for us personally, something against the grain of our very nature and personal understanding of and position in life. This may explain why sometimes He asked those He cured to spread the message (perhaps the introverts, or those whose past lives had been notorious?), whilst others (perhaps the extroverts?) He asked to remain silent about what He had done. When the Lord asked Peter to go out fishing, for example, this was totally and exactly against every grain of Peter's natural self. He was a fisherman, he'd been fishing all night, he knew it was *absolutely* pointless to try again. He knew that a carpenter didn't know what a fisherman did. The Lord's request was a blow at the justifiable pride in his specialism which every working man has. If the Lord Jesus had asked let's say *Paul* to go out fishing, well, I guess he'd have obeyed with no real difficulty. But He asked Peter to do that, at that very moment, because it was a real cross for Peter to pick up. Likewise it would have seemed logical for Paul to preach to the Jews, and Peter to the Gentiles (note how the Gentiles approached Philip, from semi-Gentile Galilee, in Jn. 12:20,21). Yet in fact the Lord God used those men in the very opposite way, right against the grain of their natural abilities. He asked goldsmiths to do the manual work of building the wall of Jerusalem, bruising their sensitive fingers against lumps of rock (Neh. 3:8,31); and Barak's victorious warriors were civil servants and writers (Jud. 5:14), not military men. Paul was sent to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews, when we'd have thought that naturally speaking, they would have been far more comfortable in the reverse roles. Judas was put in charge of the money amongst the twelve; when Matthew the tax collector would presumably have been the obvious man for the job. Naaman wanted to do some great act, but was asked to do the hardest thing for him- to dip in Jordan. And Abraham was asked to do what was so evidently the hardest thing- to offer up his only, specially beloved son.

*5:6 And when they had done this, they caught a great many fishes; and their nets were breaking-* See on Acts 2:6. As explained above, the Lord was teaching them that they were to do His work of fishing men into the Gospel net. In the similar incident after the resurrection, their nets did not break. The Lord will somehow provide the resources needed for this work. And perhaps He was also encouraging them to follow Him and forsake their fishing business because He is absolutely able to provide any amount of fish. All human endeavour and desire for income can be dramatically overridden by the Lord if we devote ourselves to His work.

*5:7 And they beckoned to their partners in the other boat, that they should come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink-* Paul seems to allude here in saying that the desire for wealth can drown believers (1 Tim. 6:9). The Lord is warning them not to allow their desire for wealth and good income to drown them;

rather they were to focus upon doing the work of the Gospel, and somehow all shall be provided.

It would seem that Peter as a working man had a love of his job. He left his fishing in Mark 1 to follow the Lord, but returned to it by Luke 5. Then he left it, and returned to it in the post-resurrection crisis. The Lord's provision of fish on the shore was simply saying: 'You don't need to fish any more'. He asked them to drag the nets to land, which would usually have broken them, but they didn't break. Likewise He had earlier told fisherman Peter to cast the net on the other side, when Peter knew full well which side of the boat there were likely to be fish. And a whirlwind storm had come upon Galilee which would have drowned fisherman and sailor Peter were it not for the Lord's presence. In all these things, Peter was being taught to quit the life that he loved. "Lovest thou me more than these?" was asked with the huge catch of fish lying there on the shore- a fisherman's dream. It could be that the question referred to them. 'Go and feed *my* sheep rather than worry about *your* fish'. When earlier the boats had begun to sink with too many fish, the word used for 'sinking' occurs in 1 Tim. 6:9, about believers being drowned in materialism and thereby condemning themselves (Lk. 5:7). Whether it's a career that we love, a livelihood that we simply trust as a sure means of human survival, or the spiritual pride that we love the Lord more than our brethren, all these things are demanded of us by the demanding Lord, as we seek to follow Him to the cross.

*5:8 But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying: Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord - See on Jn. 21:7. The Father seems to have wanted Peter to make the connection between preaching and recognition of personal sinfulness quite early on. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" was followed by a commission to go preach the Gospel to Israel, just as Isaiah had been brought to the same point and then been sent on a like mission. The picture of the condemned is presented in Scripture in some detail. We are all condemned men and women before the light of the glory of Jesus Christ. If we are to be saved in that future day, we must judge / condemn ourselves now in our self-examination (1 Cor. 11:31). This means that we ought to have their feelings in some respects; as they will have no desire to go on living in the flesh, as they will so earnestly desire entry into the Kingdom, as they will then desperately not want to go back into the world... so we should feel now, grateful that for us there is entry into the Kingdom made possible. Thus Peter asked the Lord to depart from him (Lk. 5:8), with the very same words the Lord used about what He will say to the rejected (Lk. 13:27).*

"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" was capturing the spirit of Isaiah. But the Lord responded that he was not to fear, but no now

"catch men". Peter's deep recognition of his sinfulness resulted in him being given a preaching commission. And in similar vein, Peter was given another commission to teach the word when he met the Lord after his denials (Jn. 21:15-17). In response to this he stood up and preached that forgiveness of sins was possible to all those that are afar off from God (Acts 2:39). As he did so, consciously or unconsciously, part of his mind must have been back in the way that on that shameful night he followed the Lord "afar off", and far off from Him, denied Him (Mk. 14:54). Peter's vision of the unclean animals in the net taught him that those people whom he considered unclean, he was to "eat", i.e. preach to and fellowship with. When he recounts the vision, he comments [in an account that is strictly factual in all other regards and without any embellishment]: "It [the sheet with the animals] came *even to me*" (Acts 11:5). He is expressing his unworthiness at being called to the task of preaching, just as Paul likewise expressed his inadequacy.

5:9 *For he was amazed, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken-* The huge catch of fish, which nearly drowned them, was what provoked Peter to confess how sinful he was. He felt therefore that his sin was in being materialistic, in being obsessed with that huge catch, thinking of all the money they could earn in the market by selling it. The gift of wealth elicited within him a sense of sinfulness; and it should likewise within us all.

5:10 *And so were also James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon: Fear not. From this time forward you shall catch men-* See on Lk. 9:59; Jn. 21:2. "Catch men" is Gk. 'to catch alive'. This is an example of where what sounds like predictive prophecy is actually a command, which men are free to obey or disobey. The whole section about the temple to be built in Ez. 40-48 is another example. Peter was not to "fear" his tendency to materialism and his momentary failure in this matter. He was to move onwards from that and see that the greatest thing in life is not success in our business, but bringing others into the Gospel net, dragging them, with the help of our brethren ["partners" is *koinonos*, those we fellowship with], into the Kingdom.

5:11 *And when they had brought their boats to land, they left all and followed him-* They became His disciples, that is the meaning of the idiom. They powerfully learnt the lesson- that the Lord could give business success and wealth at ease. And therefore they in a moment left it all and focused on following Him. The "all" which they left included the huge catch of fish.

Peter on the shore doesn't say to the Lord that he had 'made a mistake' or cast the net on the wrong side etc.- he confesses that he is a "sinful man" altogether. Jesus taught that sin was no longer to be seen as a list

of specific actions which must be avoided in order to have a good conscience before God. The conviction of sin as God intends is far deeper than this. As the Lord makes clear, it's all about motives, what is inside the cup rather than what appears on the outside (Lk. 11:39). And we are to press on with the work of the Gospel, regardless of our previous failings in being distracted by issues of wealth and income.

5:12 *And it came to pass, while he was in one of the cities, that there was a man full of leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, saying-* The Greek literally means to bow or crouch. Perhaps it is being used here in that literal sense, inviting us then to imagine the Lord extending His hand to the kneeling man (:13). Or the idea could be that the man's worship was not in any external display of respect, but in the fact he believed in the Lord's ability and power to respond to his request. In this case, the man worshipped Jesus *in saying* "If You will, You can...".

"Begging" is the Greek *parakleo*; and John's Gospel records at length the Lord's promise to be our *parakletos*, doing the work of comfort and entreaty, *parakleo*, for us. We see here the mutuality between a man and his Lord; both relate to each other in the same passionate way, in prayer [from our side] and in the Lord's gracious response [from His side]. The *parakleo* group of words are appropriate to both sides of the relationship.

*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean-* The Lord replied that this was indeed His will (:13). This coincidence of human will with that of our Lord is what fellowship with Him and answered prayer is all about. The phrase "If You will, You can..." is recorded identically in all three of the synoptics (Mk. 1:40; Lk. 5:12), as if they all wished to draw attention to the man's attitude and make an example of it- accepting that the Lord has all power ("can" = *dunamai*), but that our will is not always His.

The man recognized that it was within the Lord's power to heal him, but he also recognized that the Lord's will is not always ours, as His longer term plan may require Him not to respond to our request in the immediate term. This is a great example to us. For he would have been aware that the Lord did not heal all human need which He encountered; He had just left Simon's house, apparently because He didn't want to cure all the crowds surely gathering there for healing.

Faith is inculcated by an appreciation of the height of Christ's exaltation. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, "leprosy was regarded as a "stroke" only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it" (L.G. Sargent, *The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28). The leper lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave

Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: "If You will, You can [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean".

*5:13 And he stretched forth his hand and touched him, saying: I will. Be made clean-* The Lord responds within the terms of the man's request: "If You will, You can make me clean". We note the man sought cleansing above mere healing; his spiritual need for cleansing was paramount in his mind. We likewise should ask for material blessings motivated by spiritual concerns. The Lord could have cured the man in multiple ways, but he chose to touch the man, making Himself technically unclean; although it could be argued that the cure was so immediate that it was therefore debatable as to whether the Lord had actually touched a leper or not. Surely He did it the way He did to provoke such questions; for the process of questioning led to them becoming the more aware of the fact that the Lord's touch had indeed cleansed the man. And the whole question of ritual uncleanness was of course put in the spotlight. The Lord was and is unafraid to associate with the very dirtiest of human conditions and situations. There was no revulsion from them, as there is not today. The Lord is described a staggering 28 times in the synoptics as touching people. This was a studied rejection of the false teaching of 'guilt by association' or 'contamination by contact'. More than that, the Lord was at such lengths to identify Himself with suffering people.

*And immediately the leprosy departed from him-* The immediacy of the cure upon touching the Lord raised all kind of questions for the legalistic mind, as to whether the Lord was made unclean or not. The Greek literally means 'scales' and the same word is used of scales falling from Saul's eyes in Acts 9:18. It could've been any skin disease rather than Hansen's disease. In Mt. 10:8 the Lord told the disciples to likewise "cleanse the lepers". Again the Lord is giving the disciples the work of the priests to do. For it was their job to pronounce lepers cleansed. But He is asking them to do what He Himself had done here. His work was to be theirs. The later NT references to *our* being cleansed by the Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:26; Tit. 2:14; 1 Jn. 1:7,9 etc.) perhaps look back to how the historical Jesus cleansed lepers in Galilee. We are to see ourselves in that isolated and rejected man.

*5:14 And he ordered him: Tell no one, but go your way and show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing according as Moses commanded, for a testimony to them-* The Lord had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness *first and foremost* to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a

great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true. We noted on Mt. 8:3 that the work of the priests was to cleanse the leper- but this had been done by the Lord. The man was therefore to show himself to the priests- in order to demonstrate to them that another priest and priesthood was already coming into operation.

5:15 *However, the report went around concerning him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities-* Mk. 1:45 notes that therefore "Jesus could no more openly enter into a city, but stayed in deserted places". If we put the stress on the word "openly", we are left imagining Jesus somehow disguising Himself in order to enter the towns. This is the reason why the Lord so sternly charged the healed man not to spread the news (:43); the stampede of people wanting healing meant that the Lord was unable to perform His most important ministry, which was to preach rather than to heal

5:16 *But he withdrew himself into the desert and prayed-* Each healing took energy and spiritual power from the Lord (8:46). As noted on 4:42, the Lord was desperate for aloneness with God in prayer; for this was His source of being filled by the Spirit.

5:17 *And it came to pass on one of those days that he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, who had come out of every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was with him to heal-* The power of the Lord was present to heal the Pharisees- but they would not make use of what was potentially made available. The text suggests that the healing was possible for the Pharisees. The healing in view was therefore spiritual healing; and the whole incident of curing the paralyzed man was therefore in order to potentially provide the religious leaders with spiritual healing. The Lord's work in our lives is likewise multifaceted. Things happen in order that others may be taught, as happened in the life and sufferings of Job- it was to convert and teach the friends rather than Job personally, who is presented as "perfect" both before and after the recorded sufferings.

5:18 *And men brought on a bed a man that was paralysed; and they sought to bring him in and to lay him before him-* The term for "brought" is also used of bringing a sacrifice to God, but in this case of the lame. "Bed" is Gk. a table or a couch. They had grabbed whatever could serve as a stretcher.

5:19 *But not finding by what way they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went to the housetop and let him down through the tiles with*

*his couch, into the midst before Jesus-* This was all done in faith, and by doing this the Lord saw their faith (:20). Mk. 2:3 says they "carried" him, the term means literally to be taken up or away, and reflects the Hebrew term used for the bearing away of sin. And :20 confirms this association by stating that it was through the faith of the four friends that the man's sins were forgiven. This is the huge horizon of potential which there is for us in our efforts for others- we can even play a role in the Lord forgiving them their sins. This lifts the concept of pastoral work far beyond mere doing of good works.

*5:20 And seeing their faith, he said-* This is emphasized in all the accounts of this incident. Because of the faith of third parties, the sins of this man were forgiven. James speaks of the same possibility (James 5:15- the same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used there). Here we have a principle which can totally affect the course and hourly practice of our lives. In some cases, the sins of others can be forgiven because of *our* faith. Job understood that when he offered for his sons after their wild parties. Of course there are invisible limits to the principle, but many of those with whom we have to do in church life are surely within those limits. Quite simply, the salvation of others depends to some extent and in some cases- upon our faith and prayers, and effort to get them to Jesus. This imparts huge and eternal significance to our lives, lived and prayed for others. The same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used again in the enigmatic Jn. 20:23: "Whose soever sins you forgive, they are forgiven them". I suspect this is John's version of the great commission to preach the Gospel of forgiveness to others- the idea being that if we bring them to Jesus, then thanks to our efforts for them, they will be forgiven. And if we are slack to do this, then God may not always find another way, and their sins remain unforgiven. Prayer really does change things. God is willing to do things in the life of a third party (even forgive them) for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others. That man was healed for the sake of the faith of others. The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22).

*Man, your sins are forgiven you-* The Lord emphasized this first, and then went on to heal him physically. It's common for the sick and their carers to focus almost exclusively upon their need for healing, whereas the most essential human need is for forgiveness. So the Lord stressed the forgiveness first, and the healing secondly. Clearly there was a link in this case between sin and illness. It could be argued that the two things are connected as they both arise from the curse in Eden. But I would suggest that it's likely that in this case, the connection between the man's paralysis and his sin was more direct. We too often shrug at those in such situations and consider that 'it's their fault'. So it may be, but if a man digs a hole and falls into it, he's still in the hole. And we have all done this, and the Gospel was designed for us exactly because we have done

that. There is an inevitable connection between this incident and Is. 33:24, where we read of the restored Zion that "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity". The Lord is implying here as elsewhere that the prophecies of the restored Zion were to be fulfilled in the lives of individuals who had come to Him, and not in the literal glorification and exaltation of Jerusalem over the Roman occupiers.

5:21 *And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason*-Matthew adds "within themselves". Consider the huge emphasis of the New Testament upon 'thinking / talking within oneself', especially within the Gospels. The same Greek phrase is used repeatedly:

- "Think not to say within yourselves" (Mt. 3:9)
- "The scribes said within themselves" (Mt. 9:3)
- "She said within herself" (Mt. 9:21)
- The believer who fails to grow spiritually has no root "within himself" (Mt. 13:21)
- "They reasoned within themselves... Why do you reason within yourselves..." (Mt. 16:7,8)
- "The husbandmen... said within themselves" (Mt. 21:38)
- The disciples "disputed within themselves" (Mk. 9:33)
- Have salt "within yourselves" (Mk. 9:50)
- The Pharisee "spoke within himself" (Lk. 7:39)
- The guests "began to say within themselves" (Lk. 7:49)
- The rich fool "thought within himself, saying..." (Lk. 12:17)
- "The steward said within himself" (Lk. 16:3)
- The unjust judge "said within himself" (Lk. 18:4)
- Peter "doubted in himself" (Acts 10:17)
- Jews who heard the Gospel "reasoned within themselves" (Acts 28:29 Gk.)
- Israel "through the lusts of their own hearts... dishonoured their bodies within themselves" (Rom. 1:24)
- "Within yourselves... you have a better and enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34)
- "Partial within yourselves, judges of evil thoughts" (James 2:4).

There are many other Bible verses which likewise speak of the internal state of a person and the significance of our self-talk- these are just examples of one Greek phrase. It is logical therefore to expect that the great adversary or 'satan' to be internal thinking, how we think and speak within ourselves. And properly understood, this is indeed what 'satan' in the Bible sometimes refers to. We should deeply note at this point that the thoughts of men in their hearts are known to the Father and Son, and have been recorded publicly here in these records for many centuries.

*Saying: Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?*- The miracles of Jesus exposed the error of local views, e.g. of demons, without correcting them in so many words. Thus in Lk. 5:21 the Jews made two false statements: that Jesus was a blasphemer, and that God alone could forgive sins. Jesus did not verbally correct them; instead he did a miracle which proved the falsity of those statements. It was clearly the belief of Jesus that actions speak louder than words. He rarely denounced false ideas directly, thus he did not denounce the Mosaic law as being unable to offer salvation, but He showed by His actions, e.g. healing on the Sabbath, what the truth was.

The Jews got caught up on the issue of whether Christ's forgiveness of others made Him God or not- just as some folk do today. His response was to refocus them on the fact that He wanted *you* to *know* that He had real power to forgive *their* sins (Lk. 5:24). I spend a lot of time arguing against the trinity and the 'Jesus = God' mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

5:22 *But Jesus, perceiving their reasoning, answered and said to them-* Time and again, the Gospels record how He "perceived" things about people. Admittedly this could have been because He simply had a Holy Spirit gift to enable this. But I prefer to think that His sensitivity, His perception, aided by His extraordinary intellectual ability as the Son of God [for intelligence and perception / sensitivity are related]... these things developed within Him over the years so that He could sense the essential needs and feelings of others to an unsurpassed extent. "Jesus, seeing their thoughts..." (Mt. 9:4 RVmg.) shows how He came to perceive the hearts of others from His observation of them. This was the same Jesus who could be ridiculed into scorn / shame / embarrassment (Mt. 9:24), such was His sensitivity to others. This incident helps us to understand the ability of the mind / spirit of the Lord Jesus to connect with that of human beings. Mk. 2:8 puts it like this: "Now immediately, when Jesus realized in his spirit that they were contemplating such thoughts, he said to them, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?" (NET Bible). The spirit / mind of Jesus was at one with the spirit / mind of those men. Such was His sensitivity. I don't think it was a gift of Holy Spirit knowledge so much as His sensitivity to the minds of men... and yet Rom. 8:16 calls Jesus "The Spirit" as a title, saying that He bears witness with our spirit / mind, in His intercession to the Father. So this incident in the Gospels gives us as it were an insight into how He *now* operates too... He's the same today as yesterday. He's at one with our mind / spirit, and also with the mind / Spirit of the Father. Thus is He such a matchless mediator. The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew

what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha commented: "Went not my heart with you, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kings 5:26). Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money... garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When he saw their faith... when Jesus heard it..." (Mk. 2:5,17). He 'saw' and knew things by the sensitivity of His perception.

*Why reason you so in your hearts?*- This was a rhetorical question. Why did they struggle with His offer of forgiveness? Because it required an acceptance of it from them, which in turn required repentance.

5:23 *Which is easier to say*- Gk. 'less work'. The Lord meant 'Which is easier for Me'. There were plenty of claims to heal people; but to forgive sins was of a different order altogether. But the Lord is saying that for Him, they are one and the same; and that His healing was performed in this case on the basis of having forgiven the man his sin. Not only could He forgive sin, but in this case He could remove the consequence of it. For the Lord healed the man *so that* they would realize that He had power to forgive sins (:24).

*Your sins are forgiven; or to say: Arise and walk?*- The same words used by Peter when he tells the lame man to 'arise and walk' (Acts 3:6). Peter consciously or unconsciously replicated his Lord in doing healing miracles. The very body language and word choice of the Lord were so impressed upon him that they became the pattern for *his* ministry; and the same should be true of us. The paralyzed man of Jn. 5:8 was likewise told to arise, take up his bed and walk- using the same words used here about the paralyzed man. Clearly the Lord Jesus worked with people according to some pattern. And we can discern similar hallmarks of His work as we get to know each other within the body of Christ today, perceiving as we exchange stories and testimonies that the Lord in essence works in similar ways between human lives today.

5:24 *But that you may know*- The reason for the healing miracle was to teach that He could forgive sins. This is why I suggest that in this man's case, his paralysis was a direct and publicly known result of his sin. Perhaps he had been alcoholic, or become paralyzed in an accident whilst stealing something. In this case his friends are to be commended for so wanting his healing, because many would have shrugged him off as someone who was suffering justly. The link between his illness and his sin was so clear that to heal him was seen as effectively forgiving him *and* removing the consequence of his sin. David, Moses and others often asked for the consequences of sin to be removed and at times received this. The palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to *teach others* that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. Job was a "perfect" man before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a 'perfect' man at

the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others (2 Cor. 1:4). He didn't *only* reward the faith of the man's friends; His motive for the miracle was to seek to teach those Scribes. Our tendency surely would have been to ignore them, to be angry that in the face of grace they could be so legalistic and petty and so far, far from God... and get on and heal the sick man who believed. But the Lord's picture of human salvation was far wider and more inclusive and more hopeful than that.

*That the Son of Man-* The humanity of Jesus was the very basis upon which He could and can forgive human sin. This is why Mt. 9:8 records that the crowds praised God for having given such power *unto men*. He understood Himself as rightful judge of humanity exactly because He was "son of man" (Jn. 5:27)- because every time we sin, He as a man would've chosen differently, He is therefore able to be our judge. And likewise, exactly because He was a "son of man", "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins". If it is indeed true that "'Son of Man' represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism", then we can understand the play on words the Lord was making- for the term 'son of man' can also without doubt just mean 'humanity generally'. Exactly because He was human, and yet perfect, He was so exalted.

*Has authority on earth to forgive sins (he said to him who was paralyzed)-* He had that power during His mortal life, and yet after His resurrection "all power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth" (Mt. 28:18). His power to save and forgive is therefore even greater. Perhaps the contrast was that He had the power of forgiveness delegated to Him in specific cases during His ministry, but after the resurrection He had power in His own right to forgive, not on the basis of delegated power but power / authority in His own Name; even though that exalted position was of course given Him by God the Father.

The Jews got caught up on the issue of whether Christ's forgiveness of others made Him God or not- just as some folk do today. His response was to refocus them on the fact that He wanted *you* to *know* that He had real power to forgive *their* sins. I spend a lot of time arguing against the trinity and the 'Jesus = God' mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

The disciples observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him. But in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ makes

you whole", thereby recognizing the connection between him and his Lord.

"He said to him that was paralyzed" suggests He turned from the Jews to the paralyzed man. It could be that the healing was really for the benefit of the hard hearted scribes- the Lord was going to all this trouble to try to persuade them of His authority as God's Son. We would likely have given up with them, but the way the Lord kept on trying with the orthodox Jews of His day is an essay in perseverance in witnessing. And amazingly, it paid off- in that a number of priests and Pharisees were baptized after His resurrection (Acts 6:7; 15:5).

*I say to you, arise and take up your bedding and go to your house-* The same word is used for taking up the cross (Mt. 16:24), and the Greek for "bed" is also translated a table or couch. He was to pick up a piece of wood and go his way. He was given a simple task of obedience immediately after meeting with Jesus, and we can see that pattern repeated in how the Lord works with people today.

The Lord was sensitive to the situation of those He healed or converted. Just as He commanded the resurrected girl to be given something to eat, so He realized the pressure that would be on the healed man- and so He told him to go home immediately and thus avoid the limelight.

*5:25 And immediately, he stood up before them, picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God-* Emphasizing his exact and studied obedience to the Lord's command to Him to go home (:24). He did it "before them [all]"- another hint that the miracle was for teaching purposes; the Lord was surrounded by people eager for healing, and instead He taught them. The immediacy of the cure, especially in response to the faith of third parties, was utterly unknown amongst those who had seen too many fake healers attempting to heal illness.

*5:26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God; and they were filled with fear, saying: We have seen strange things today-* This is a strange mixture, at first blush- glorifying God and yet being filled with fear instead of joy, describing the wonderful healing and forgiveness as "strange things". Why the barrier to joyful acceptance of the Lord's work? I suggest as noted on :22 that His offer of forgiveness demanded acceptance of it, and therefore repentance. And so they preferred to act bemused and confused, as many do to this day when faced with God's truth in Christ, preferring the search rather than the finding of the ultimate truth- that really we can be forgiven and faith rewarded in salvation and the ultimate healing of persons. On one hand, they knew it was all true, and "glorified God". But then their humanity kicked in. And we see this so often in folk today.

5:27 *And after these things he went and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office, and said to him: Follow me-* Matthew, according to Matthew's record. There is reason to believe that Matthew was himself a converted Scribe, who had perhaps turned away from it to being a tax collector; the way he has access to various versions of Scripture and quotes them as having been fulfilled in a way reminiscent of the Jewish commentaries (compare Mt. 4:12-17 with Mk. 1:14,15) suggests this. Matthew's other name was Levi, strengthening the possibility he was once a Levitical scribe; for the scribes were drawn from the priests and Levites. The point is that in this case Matthew would be referring to himself when he writes: "Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Mt. 13:52). Yet he does so in a beautifully oblique and selfless manner. The Scribes have just been mentioned in the previous incident, which apparently took place within sight of Matthew's desk (Mt. 9:3).

It's hard to grasp the degree to which tax collectors were despised and distrusted. We may at times think that we need to show our best front personally when preaching the Gospel, to display our credentials, in order to persuade others of our message. Matthew thought otherwise. He was quite open about who he had been when he was called. Human credentials do not ultimately persuade men and women of Christ- a degree in theology, knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, academic status, a stable career, an externally spotless family history. Rather do the Gospels show us that it is those from questionable backgrounds who are chosen by the Lord as His most effective messengers. The content of the message ultimately far outweighs the credibility of the messenger. And the same is seen today in the preaching of the Gospel.

It was whilst he was at work that he was called, just as the other disciples were called exactly whilst they were about their fishing business, and like Matthew, left all and "followed" the Lord. This is when the call of Christ comes to us- in the very midst of secular life, rather than resting at home looking at a screen.

"Follow me" means to share the same road with. And the road or way of Jesus led to Jerusalem, to the death of the cross, and then to life eternal. The word is used about 80 times in the Gospels. The call was to follow Jesus; the crowds followed, the disciples followed, but often the Lord tries to teach them the difference between merely externally following Him on the same public road, and following Him as He intends; which is to carry a cross and follow Him to Golgotha. We who follow Him in our life situations today are in essence continuing the following of Him which began in those early days in Galilee. But we likewise are challenged as to whether our following is mere membership of a denomination, or a personal following of Him.

5:28 *And he forsook all, and rose up and followed him-* Exactly as he had just observed the paralyzed man obediently arise and go where the Lord told him. It's as if Matthew saw himself in that paralyzed man. As the man was laying on the 'bed', so Matthew was sitting 'on' the receipt of custom, the elevated chair and desk (*epi*, translated "at", is better translated in this context "on"). The Lord spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people- so that a man arose and followed Him. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

The Lord valued persons for who they were, and this had radical results in practice. And yet He spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed (Mk. 2:14), is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

5:29 *And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and of others that were dining with them-* Clearly the associates of Matthew. They came and sat down with Jesus whilst He was eating. And He accepted them. Given the religious significance of eating together, note the Lord's open table.

5:30 *And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying: Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?-* See on Lk. 7:39. To eat together had a religious dimension; the Lord was seen as fellowshiping sinners at His table in a radically open manner, just as we should. To break your bread with someone, to eat together, was a religious act in Palestinian Jewish society. The Lord broke His bread with sinners in order to bring them to repentance; not because He considered they had cleared some kind of bar of moral and doctrinal acceptability. His table was open, radically so, and so should ours be.

The disciples were from very varied backgrounds; and Lk. 5:30 RVmg. describes how publicans and sinners had Pharisees and Scribes among them as they all sat at the same table gathered around Jesus. There was something in His person and teaching which welded people together.

5:31 *And Jesus answering said to them: They that are in health have no need of a doctor, but they that are sick-* "Doctor" is literally, a healer. The same word is used of how "by his stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). All who will finally be saved have been healed by Jesus. Therefore "they that be whole" must be understood as meaning 'those who *think they are whole*'. The Lord's healing work was done by fellowshiping with those who realized their need for healing. He broke His bread with them first; He didn't heal them and then invite only the healed to His exclusive table. This breaking of bread with them was a 'calling to repentance' (:32). The many records of the Lord's physical healing were all intended to be acted parables of His healing of spiritual sickness

The Greek word for "in health" is usually translated with the sense of 'being able'. The Lord's work was with them who felt *unable* to be righteous, who felt that circumstance and past history had left them spiritually incapacitated.

Perception of need and spiritual helplessness is the vital prerequisite. The Lord healed "them that had need of healing" (Lk. 9:11), those who perceived their need. The Lord uses the same word in speaking of how He doesn't go find and save those "which need no repentance" (Lk. 15:11); again, an ellipsis must be read in: 'Those who *think they* need no repentance'. And again in Rev. 3:17- the Laodiceans thought that they "had need of nothing". This, therefore, was a major concern of the Lord- that we cease to perceive our need for Him. The attitude that 'I have no need...' is picked up by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:21,24, where he warns against thinking that we have no need of weaker members of the body of Christ. Our need for Christ personally is to be reflected in practice in our need for association with His body, however weak we feel it to be. God supplies all our need in Christ (Phil. 4:19), but that supplying of our need is not solely in the death of Christ for us, but in the body of Christ.

5:32 *I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance-* He was implying, 'I came not to call those who believe they are righteous'. But Jesus spoke to them on their own terms, even though, technically, He was using language which was untrue. See on Lk. 19:23. The Lord is referring to the wicked Pharisees here as "the righteous... they that are whole". Yet they were not righteous. He was speaking of them according to how they saw themselves.

It was the disciples who had only recently been 'called'- because they considered themselves sinners, the sick who needed a doctor.

Consider how the Lord asks Zacchaeus to eat with Him- a public sign of religious fellowship in first century Palestine. This acceptance of the man for who and where he was, inspired Zacchaeus to then start changing his life in practice- he then offered to give back what he had stolen. When quizzed as to why He ate / fellowshiped with sinners, the Lord replied that He had come to call sinners to repentance. Think through the implications of this. He fellowshiped with those who were so weak within the ecclesia of Israel so as to bring them to repentance; His eating with them was like a doctor making a home visit. The religious attitude of the Pharisees was that one only fellowshiped someone who was repentant; whereas the Lord said that He fellowshiped with people to bring them to repentance. Note how in Lk. 19:1-10, the Lord offered salvation to sinners *before* they had repented. It's the same idea.

The fellowship of the Lord Jesus was a call towards repentance, not a reward for it. See on Mt. 3:11; John baptized people *unto* repentance. The methods of the Lord should be ours, for having spent His ministry doing this, He transferred it to us in bidding us likewise go worldwide and call others to repentance (Lk. 24:47).

*5:33 And they said to him: The disciples of John fast often and make supplications, likewise also the disciples of the Pharisees; but your disciples eat and drink- Was this also in Capernaum? If so, we note that John's influence had spread as far north as Galilee. In any case, the impression is given of wave after wave of questioning, activity, controversy. It would've all been so mentally draining of the Lord's spirituality and emotions.*

The implication was that they didn't even fast at the Day of Atonement, the one Biblical command for fasting. The Lord's disciples were mostly secular men whom He was trying to turn into spiritual people. And this continues to be the thrust of His work with people. The focus of our preaching should likewise be on getting unspiritual, secular people to believe, rather than focusing on trying to persuade those who already believe in Him to change their understandings of some points. I don't say we shouldn't do this, but far more will be achieved to His glory by bringing unbelievers to faith, rather than correcting misbelievers. Another reason why John's disciples thought the Lord's men didn't fast could have been because they took seriously His command to not appear to others to fast. And John's disciples proclaiming their fasting meant they were overlooking the Lord's clear teaching *not* to do this in the Sermon on the Mount. But in His gracious way, the Lord didn't point out the obvious *faux pas* in their reasoning. He could've said 'John told you to obey Me. I teach not to proclaim your own fasting. Why aren't you obedient to My teaching?'. But instead He reasoned with them on their own ground. And again, we see a pattern for our engagement with others- not to always baldly confront misunderstanding and reduce it to a right / wrong, black

and white issue, but to lead the person further by accepting for a moment that their faulty assumptions are true; for they are true to the person who holds them, and the Lord recognized that.

We also see the Lord's gentle grace in teaching His disciples how to fast, acting as if they were not fasting; when actually they never fasted at all until that point. He wanted them to continue showing themselves to be secular men, who really believed in Jesus. This had been exactly His approach until age 30, to manifest God's perfection through the shroud of ordinariness.

The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them. When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the shewbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a Sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the shewbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had (Lk. 6:1-4).

*5:34 And Jesus said to them: Can you make the wedding guests fast, while the bridegroom is with them?*- He spoke of how that band of rough, mixed up men were filled with the joy of little bridesmaids because He was among them. Now this is an essay in imputed righteousness. The Lord saw the zeal of the uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going (Mt. 11:12). And even after reprimanding them for their slowness of heart to believe, the record graciously says that they "believed not for joy"- although joy can never hinder faith.

John had likened himself to the Lord's best man at a forthcoming wedding. The Lord phrases his reply to John's disciples in terms they would've understood- a pattern for us to follow in our response to people. Note too that the Lord's answer implied that His wedding was about to happen. He hoped against hope that Israel would respond, and the Messianic banquet would be soon. But in His later parables, He spoke of how even the guests couldn't be bothered to attend it; it was delayed until human response was suitable. But His hopefulness for human response is again a pattern for us, to have a hopeful attitude in our witness.

The joy of the bridegroom's friends is a sharing of the groom's joy. John's Gospel records this truth in a different way when speaking of how the Lord's joy is to be our joy (Jn. 15:11; 17:13); at His return, we will enter into His joy (Mt. 25:21). We note again how the Lord phrased His response to John's disciples in terms they would best relate to- for John had said that his joy was complete, because he was 'the friend of the bridegroom' (Jn. 3:29). The Lord is saying that His disciples are also friends of the bridegroom- He is seeking to persuade John's disciples that actually His disciples are the same as they are, notwithstanding differences in spiritual culture, in that they are related to Jesus in the same way, as friends of the groom. The Lord was always very positive about His followers. He explained their lack of fasting on their joy at the forthcoming Messianic banquet, when in reality their lack of fasting was because they were secular, non-religious people. The Lord wasn't naïve, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (Mt. 17:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom. Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognised Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had.

5:35 *But the days will come*- Not necessarily plural- s.w. "the day" (Mt. 6:34; 10:15), "that day" (Mt. 7:22).

*When the bridegroom shall be taken away from them; then will they fast, in those days*- The Gk. *apairo* ["taken away"] is a form of the Greek *pairō* which has just been used in Mt. 9:6 ("*take up* your bed") and which is now used in the next verse about the new cloth 'taking from' the old garment (Mt. 9:16). What exactly the connection of thought might be is hard to say. But clearly the 'taking of Jesus from' the disciples was to be at the same time as when the new wine and new cloth were available, which would 'take from' the old cloth in destroying it. This time was surely the death of the Lord Jesus, at which the new wine of His blood confirmed the new covenant and thus ended the old. It was then of course that the disciples mourned (s.w. Mk. 16:10 "they *mourned* and wept"); and the same Greek word for 'taken from' occurs in Jn. 19:15 where the Jews cry "Away with Him!"- to the cross; in Jn. 19:31,38 where the body of Jesus is 'taken from' the cross and in Acts 8:33 "His life is *taken from* the earth". Significantly, Col. 2:14 uses the word to describe how on the cross, Christ 'took away' the old covenant. This is the idea of its usage in Mt. 9:16, that the new wine and new garment would 'take from / away' the old. And it was achieved by the 'taking away' of Jesus at the cross. Through the grace of Jesus, He is in love with us; He has called us to be

His bride. He sees us in an extremely positive light. He counts us as righteous to a degree that is a real struggle to believe- even during His ministry, "when we were yet sinners", and when the only example He had of His bride were those faltering 12. He tells the Jews that His people will fast and mourn for His absence after His departure, with the intensity that the friends of the bridegroom would have if the groom suddenly collapsed and died at the wedding (this seems to be the picture of Mt. 9:15, seeing "taken away" as an idiom for sudden death). This is surely a positive view of the sorrow of the body of Christ for their Lord's absence. Even if we see in this mini-parable only a description of the disciples' sorrow after the Lord's death, He is giving a very positive description of the disciples' joy, saying that they didn't fast for joy of being with Him; He describes their joy as the joy of the friends of the groom at the wedding. Yet the Gospels paint the twelve as a struggling, uncertain group of men, eaten up with the petty arguments of this life, unused to the self-control of fasting. Peter, for example, had until very recently been a possibly immoral young fisherman (1 Pet. 4:3). The happiness of the disciples is explained in terms of them being at a wedding. The happiness of the wedding is normally associated with alcohol, and the context here goes on to explain that Christ's new covenant is symbolised by new wine. The difference between John's disciples and Christ's was that Christ's were full of the joy of the new covenant. But there is ample reason to think that they were heavily influenced by Judaist thinking; they didn't go and preach to the Gentile world as Christ commanded, and even Peter was marvellously slow to realize the Jewish food laws had been ended by Christ, despite the Lord's strong implication of this in Mk. 7:19 (not AV). Yet the grace of Jesus saw His men *as if* they had grasped the meaning of the new covenant, *as if* they had the joy of true faith in and understanding of His work; and He spoke of them to the world in these terms. We can take untold comfort from this; for we dare to believe that the Lord does and will confess our name (character) in a like exalted manner to the Father and His Angels.

There seems to be the idea that fasting was somehow part of the Mosaic system that we have now left behind. Yet the Sermon on the Mount clearly implies that the Lord saw fasting as part of the path of discipleship (Mt. 6:16-18). And there are many examples of fasting in the Old Testament that are quite unconnected with obedience to the Law. When the bridegroom is away, then we will fast [by implication, for His return]. Try it, that's all I can say. Just start by going without some meals. Use the time and the natural desire to eat to increase the poignancy of the special requests you are making. Is. 58:4 RV says that fasting makes "your voice to be heard on high". Yet the essence of fasting is to take us out of our comfort zone. We human beings have a great tendency to form habits in order to create or keep us within the comfort zone. Yet truly creative thinking and action, not to say true obedience to the call of Christ, all occur outside of the comfort zone. Fasting is only one of many

ways to go outside of it. Take a different route home from work; describe your faith to yourself in terms and language you wouldn't usually use. Pray at different times, bring before the Lord the most banal things you usually wouldn't dream of talking with Him about.

Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome. And yet the Lord pronounced that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting because of His work. But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.

*5:36 And he spoke also a parable to them: No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it upon an old garment, else he will tear the new, and also the piece from the new will not agree with the old-* The same phrase for "old garment" is used to describe the Mosaic system in Heb. 1:11. The stress may be on "a *piece*". Taking parts of Christ's teachings like fasting was the temptation being given in to by John's disciples. The torn old garment had to be thrown away and the new one totally accepted and publicly worn. The Greek for "new" is not the same as in "new wine" in :37. Here the word means not dressed, not worked by a dressmaker. The only other time the related word occurs is in Mk. 9:3 concerning the clothes of Jesus not having been worked by a dressmaker (AV "fuller"). The Lord Jesus presents Himself here as raw, fresh, unworked to suite the appearance of men.

To get a piece out of a new garment, that new garment would be spoiled; and the old one likewise would be rent further (Mt., Mk.). "New" cloth refers to cloth which hasn't yet been washed; on first washing of the new garment, it would shrink, and thus make a tear. The tragic waste envisioned here is like the new wine running away on the ground from the burst old bottles. Likewise the old wine skins would've had to have the old wine poured out from them to have this new wine put into them. Mixing the old life and the new covenant, a bit of the one here and a bit of the other there, results in this tragic wastage all around. The parables make it seem so obvious that this isn't the way to go; but in reality, we find it hard to be so complete in our devotion to the new covenant.

Jesus told this parable in the context of His eating with sinners- clothing and wine were part of the 'eating out' scene; He took whatever was around Him and made spiritual lessons out of it. To get a piece out of a new garment, that new garment would be spoiled; and the old one likewise would be rent further (Mt., Mk.). "New" cloth refers to cloth which hasn't yet been washed; on first washing of the new garment, it would shrink, and thus make a tear. The tragic waste envisioned here is like the new wine running away on the ground from the burst old bottles. Likewise the old wine skins would've had to have the old wine poured out from them to have this new wine put into them. Mixing the old life and the new covenant, a bit of the one here and a bit of the other there, results in this tragic wastage all around. The parables make it seem so obvious that this isn't the way to go; but in reality, we find it hard to be so complete in our devotion to the new covenant.

The unrent garment is that of Christ- the same Greek words are used about the fact that His garment was not rent at His death (Jn. 19:24). Division both within ourselves and within the community is caused by partial response to the new covenant; mixing grace with legalism; it is a rending of Christ's garment, cutting out just a part of it and mixing it with the old way. An old garment that is torn can't be mended by anything new- it must be thrown out and a new garment accepted. The Mosaic system is described as an old garment in Heb. 1:11; it "shall perish" uses the same Greek word as in 5:37, where the bottles "perish". The new garment of Christ is unrent. We are each clothed with the white garment of Christ's imputed righteousness (Rev. 19:8; Mt. 22:11); by dividing with each other we are seeking to rend and thereby destroy that covering. "New" translates a different Greek word than that which in the parallel Mt. 9:16 and Mk. 2:21 is translated "new". The word there means something which has not been carded. "*Agnaphos* is a combination of the negative article *a*, with *knapto*, meaning, "to card". It is sometimes translated undressed, uncombed or, as above, unfinished, and refers to wool or cotton cloth that has not been carded or combed so that the fibers are aligned, giving it both strength and a smoother, more finished appearance". This suggests that the New Covenant is an unfinished work, God's work in us is ongoing and may take apparently unstable turns and changes- e.g. prophecy is often conditional, the intended timing of Christ's return has and may yet still change, dependent upon factors like the freewill repentance of Israel; God may plan one line of possibility for someone or a whole nation, e.g. Nineveh or Israel at the time of Moses- but change His stated intention in response to human prayer and repentance. This open-ended approach simply can't be squared with the "old" set-in-stone approach of the Old Covenant. The same message is taught by the next parable- *new* wineskins are required, because the New Covenant wine is fermenting, they need to be soft and flexible enough to change; if they are old and set, they will burst because of the movement

and dynamism of the new wine. The wine of the Lord Jesus is therefore not about tradition, about a set pattern; but is rather a call to constant change and evolution. Yet paradoxically, religious people become set in their ways more than any, and seek stability in those traditions; whereas the activity of the Lord Jesus is the very opposite.

Old and new covenants cannot overlap. The encounter with Christ means that ultimately there can be no brinkmanship in remaining partly with the old way, be it the Mosaic way of legalism or the way of secular modern life, and partly in the Lord's way. There will only be a painful and messy division in the end.

*5:37 And no one puts new wine into old wine-skins, or else the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilt, and the skins will perish-* The new wine is a clear reference to Christ's blood of the new covenant.

Wine skins were made of goat skin. The goats speak of the rejected, the sinners, in the parable of the sheep and goats. The wine skins may therefore speak of our flesh of sin. It's no sin to be a human being and have human flesh, but because of the nature of the new wine, we must become wholly new- or we will be destroyed. The new wine fermented powerfully- similar to the Lord describing His Gospel as yeast which works through flour (Lk. 13:21). The new covenant will work powerfully in us if we let it, and our skins, the life structure we have, must be prepared to accept that. Each wineskin expanded slightly differently in response to the fermenting of the new wine poured into it; no two wineskins expanded to an identical shape or form. We too will individually and uniquely respond to the new wine.

The skins will be "burst", Gk. to shatter, divide. The context is of John's disciples uniting with the Pharisees against the disciples of Jesus. He's saying that if His new wine is not totally accepted, if it is mixed with the old, then lives will be destroyed through further schism. The only basis for avoiding schism is a total acceptance by all parties of the blood of the new covenant.

"Spilt" is the same word used in Lk. 20:20 about the blood of the new covenant being "shed". We can crucify Christ afresh (Heb. 6:6), His death can be "in vain" for us (Gal. 2:21)- if we refuse to respond and be renewed, or trust in our own works. Especially significant is the reference in Mt. 26:28 to Christ's blood of the *new* covenant being "shed". Failed spiritual life, the life which only partially accepts the new wine of Christ but refuses to change, refusing to be new containers for it, results in the blood of Christ being as it were shed, the blood of Calvary wasted in the dust, and Christ crucified afresh by our apostasy (Heb. 6:6). This is the final tragedy of refusing to change upon receipt of the new wine.

5:38 *But new wine must be put into fresh wine-skins-* AV adds "and both are preserved", Gk. preserved from loss / ruin. There is a very real sense of loss to Jesus if His blood (the new wine) is as it were poured out in vain. There will be tragic loss both to Him and to the person who refuses to be wholly renewed. The word is used of the final destruction in condemnation at the last day (Mt. 10:28,39; 16:25; Jn. 3:15). The lives of the untransformed recipients of the new wine are shattered ("break") and then finally they are destroyed in final condemnation. The loss is not only to the untransformed person. There is also a loss and damage to the new wine, the Lord Jesus. He is not undamaged by the loss of any of His people. Their failure is His re-crucifixion, the pouring out again of His blood, but in vain. All this signals the danger of not being totally transformed after having received the Truth. Interestingly, a form of the Greek *suntereo* ["preserved"] is used in Jn. 2:10, where it is noted that the Lord Jesus *kept* [Gk. *tereo*] the best wine. *Tereo* is frequently on the lips of the Lord in John's Gospel (and is widely used by John in his letters), in the context of 'keeping' His word. But this is done by totally surrendering human life to be a vessel totally devoted to the new wine we have received, rather than steel willed, nail-biting, white-knuckled struggle for obedience to specific laws.

5:39 *And no one having drunk old wine immediately then desires new wine; for he says: The old is good-* The Lord here recognizes the basic conservatism of human nature; even those who consider themselves "liberal" are often only so in comparison to others, in relative terms- we are all in fact basically conservative. We stick with what we know and don't easily go outside our comfort zone of the old and familiar. We all find change hard; new wineskins are able to be stretched. He was perhaps, in the context, making some apology for John's disciples, who still couldn't fully allow themselves to be filled with the new covenant wine. The Gospel of Jesus is all about change and being stretched; and He recognizes that we find this so very difficult. People do not immediately / quickly respond to the new wine of the new covenant because, the Lord piercingly observed, they think the old was better (Lk. 5:39). He perceived, with His amazing penetration of the human psyche, that there is a conservatism deep within us all that militates against the immediate response to Him and the new wine of His blood / sacrifice which He so seeks. Yet once we have made this immediate response in a few things, it becomes easier to get into an upward spiral of response to Him. We become truly a new creation in Him, breaking constantly with factor after factor in our past, which has previously defined us as persons. Quite simply, we become new persons, with all the rejection of the 'old' ways which this requires.

The parable of the sower shows how the Lord foresaw that the majority

who responded to His word would not hold on; He knew that men would not immediately appreciate the blood of His cross, but would prefer the old wine of the old covenant (Lk. 5:39). He saw that our spiritual growth would be an agonizingly slow business; as slow as a tiny mustard seed growing into a tree, as slow as a man digging a foundation in rock, or a seed growing and bringing forth fruit. Such growth is *very slow from a human perspective*.

The parable of the wine exactly predicted the attitude of people to Christ's work in taking the Old Covenant out of the way. The Lord is surely saying: 'I know you won't immediately want the blood of my new covenant. I understand your nature, by nature you'll prefer what you are familiar with, the Old Covenant; you won't "straightway" desire the new wine, but (by implication) you will, after a while' (Lk. 5:39). He foresaw how the implication of the blood of His sacrifice wouldn't be accepted by His people first of all. It would be a process, of coming to accept how radical the gift of His blood is. As we weekly take the cup of His covenant, we come to see more and more the excellency of that blood, and its supremacy over all else. Christ recognized that conservatism in human nature which will naturally shy away from the marvellous implications of what He achieved for us. And true enough, whenever we talk about the present aspect of the Kingdom of God, our present blessings of redemption in Christ, the sense in which we have already been saved...there is a desire to shy away from it all. And true enough, the early Christian believers desperately clung on to the Mosaic food laws, circumcision and synagogue attendance as far as they could; the command to witness to the Gentiles was likewise not taken seriously for some time. It must have been painful for the Lord to know this and to see it, recognizing in it a lack of appreciation of His life and final sacrifice, a desire to reconcile with God without totally committing oneself to His work. He saw the possibility of His blood being wasted if men didn't change from old to new wineskins. The slowness of the changeover in attitudes amongst the early believers must have been a great pain to Him; as if His blood was being poured out again. The implication is that we shed His blood afresh if we won't change, if we allow the conservatism of our natures to have an iron grip upon us we not only destroy ourselves, but waste the blood of the Son of God. The picture of the new wine being "spilled" uses the same word as in Mt. 26:28 concerning the 'shedding' of Christ's blood. Again, how utterly, painfully accurate. This is the danger of the conservatism that is in our natures; it was this which led men to shed the Lord's blood, and it is this same element within us which He foresaw would lead us to crucify Him afresh. How many times has this conservatism been mistaken as true spirituality! How careful we must be, therefore, not to adopt any attitude which glorifies that conservatism and masks it as the hallmark of a stable believer. The sensitivity of Jesus to the value of the human person was the very opposite of this.



## CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Now it came to pass on a Sabbath that he was going through the grain fields-* The very poor were allowed to do this by the Law (Lev. 19:9; Dt. 23:24,25), and so we see in this a picture of the deep poverty of the Lord's followers; He later parallels the urgent hunger of David's men at the time of 1 Sam. 21 with that of His followers. It would seem that He Himself did not make use of the concession, because the criticism was focused upon His disciples rather than Himself. W.D. Davies lists evidence that Judaism forbade fasting on the Sabbath (Jubilees 50:12) (W.D. Davies *Matthew* p. 312 (*op cit.*)). In this case, the record is showing how the legalism of the time would've condemned the disciples- and the poor generally- either way: for fasting on the Sabbath, or for 'threshing' on the Sabbath to get food so as not to fast. The Lord therefore takes the whole argument to a level far above such petty legalism.

*And his disciples plucked the ears and ate, rubbing them in their hands-* See on Mt. 26:11. The only point in mentioning this would presumably be because the Pharisees came and stopped them. This shows how closely the Lord and His men were under the critical eyes of others, even from a distance.

6:2 *But certain of the Pharisees said: Why do you do what is unlawful on the Sabbath day?-* A constant concern with the Pharisees (Mt. 19:3; 22:17; 27:6; Jn. 5:10; 18:31). The Lord's attitude here was to show that the Old Testament itself envisaged situations where true spirituality was above law. The parable of Mt. 20:15 brings the point home- the generous employer justified his pouring out of grace, giving the weak and lazy the same penny a day as the hard workers, on the basis that 'It is lawful for me to do what I wish'.

6:3 *And Jesus answered them, saying: Have you not read-* Of course they had, many times. But the Lord here and several times elsewhere challenges them (and us) as to whether we have really read what we have. The Lord could have legitimately answered them: 'It is lawful to pick corn whilst passing through a field, the Law allows for this if one is poor, and my followers are indeed poor. There is nothing in the Law which stipulates this permission doesn't operate on the Sabbath'. But as always, the Lord was prepared to meet people where they were, and to take them to a higher level. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter. He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

*What David did when he was hungry, he and they that were with him?*- The Lord's reasoning depends upon drawing a parallel between Himself and David, and David's warriors and the disciples. Again, He is encouraging them to see themselves as no less than the warriors of David who later became the governors of Israel. Aaron's sons were the ones who were intended to eat the showbread (Lev. 24:5-9)- and again the Lord is inviting His secular disciples to see themselves as a new priesthood.

6:4 *How he entered the house of God*- For non-Levites to enter the Sanctuary was also not 'lawful', quite apart from eating the bread which only the priests could lawfully eat. This prepares the way for the Lord's later parable about God urging unclean street people to 'enter [His] house' because Israel had rejected the invitation (the same words are used- Lk. 14:23). The psychological magnitude of the Lord's new system of thinking is hard to appreciate. Non-Levites could now enter it- and even the worst of the Gentiles. But the magnitude of the new thinking in Christ for anyone, not least secular people of the 21st Century, is no less.

*And took and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?*- The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them (Lk. 5:33,34). When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the showbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a Sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the showbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had.

"Gave it to those with him" recalls how the Lord blessed the bread and gave it to those with *Him*. He was turning the ordinary bread of the people into the shewbread of the sanctuary. Clearly the Lord is suggesting that His ragtag crowd of disciples and questionable ministering women were the new priesthood of a new Israel.

6:5 *And he said to them: The Son of Man is lord*- Here as elsewhere we see the juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His Lordship. His exaltation is precisely because He was human; He has authority to judge us because He was Son of man (Jn. 5:27). The Lordship of Jesus was predicated upon His obedience to death and exaltation (Acts 2:36), and yet Jesus was calmly confident that this would be achieved by Him; to the point that He could reason that He already was "Lord" and thereby able to abrogate the Sabbath and act as the ultimate temple.

*Of the Sabbath-* The "of" is supplied as guesswork by the translators; it could equally be left unsupplied, giving the sense of "the Lord the Sabbath"; or, "Lord on the Sabbath". Mark adds that the Lord went on to teach that God's law was made for man, rather than man being built in such a way as to easily fit in with God's word (Mk. 2:27).

*6:6 And it came to pass on another Sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered-* The point is that the Lord was *outside* the synagogue when He had recently declared that the "place" where He was then standing, in or near a cornfield, was holy ground; see on Mt. 12:6. It was "their" synagogue, just as the temple was "the temple of the Jews", and the feasts of Yahweh had been hijacked to become "the feast of the Jews". It's typical of Luke as a doctor to mention the medical details. God's Spirit worked through the natural perceptions and personalities of those who were inspired, and achieves a similar synthesis in working with us today. His right hand suggests his own strength and ability to act was withered.

*6:7 And the scribes and Pharisees watched him closely, whether he would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against him-* A legal term. They wanted to get Jesus in court over this issue. But there's no evidence they actually did, and there was no recorded mention of Sabbath breaking in His final trial- so well and profoundly did He answer them. Their false accusation of Him was especially seen at His trials. Pilate's question to them "What accusation do you bring against this man?" (Jn. 18:29) shows the Jews as the ultimate false accusers of God's Son. For it was because of their playing the ultimate role of the Devil, the false accuser, that the Son of God was slain. No wonder the ideas of 'Devil' and 'Satan' are often associated with the Jewish system's opposition of Christ and His people. The same Greek word for 'accuser' is five times used about Jewish false accusation of Paul in an attempt to hinder His work for Christ (Acts 23:30,35; 24:8; 25:16,18).

*6:8 But he knew their thoughts-* The Lord's ability to read minds and motives (5:22; Jn. 2:25) was partly given by the Spirit, but also an outcome of His own extreme sensitivity to humanity, and also His undoubted intellectual ability as God's Son. He was far ahead of all depth psychologists of later generations. I will suggest later regarding the triumphal entry that the Lord set up all the circumstances surrounding His death and apparent 'capture' by the Jews and betrayal by Judas; He therefore knew exactly the events which would follow, as the chess grandmaster foresees the game in advance. Rev. 2:23 states that the Lord to this day has this ability, even more enhanced by His Divine nature.

*And he said to the man that had his hand withered: Rise up and stand in the midst. And he arose and stood-* The Lord's miracles were performed for a range of reasons, quite apart from basic sympathy with the sick. He

often used them to teach lessons to the onlookers; and this explains the way He asked the man to cooperate in public display.

*6:9 And Jesus said to them: I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do harm? To save a life, or to destroy it?- See on Lk. 9:54,55.* The Lord said that to refrain from saving a man when it was in your power to do so was effectively "to do evil... to destroy" (Lk. 6:9 AV). This is how the Lord looks at our laziness and passivity- as active wrongdoing. Sins of omission are probably our greatest temptation.

Mark records that He developed this point- if He had *not* performed the miracle, He would have been actively committing "evil", even 'killing'. When the Lord taught that it was right to break the Sabbath because they were in the business of saving life (Mk. 3:4), His words were purposefully alluding to how the Maccabees had pronounced that it was acceptable for Jewish soldiers to break the Sabbath in time of war, in order to save lives through their fighting (1 Macc. 2:32). He intended His people to live as active soldiers on duty, at war in order to save the lives of God's people. Indeed, so frequently, the whole language of the future judgment is applied to us right here and now. We are living out our judgment now; we are standing as it were before the final judgment seat, and receiving our judgment for how we act, speak and feel and are. Thus if He had omitted to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, this would have been 'doing evil' and even 'killing' (Mk. 3:4). That's how seriously He took omitting to do good when it's in our power to do it. He had a choice of saving life or destroying life, were He to prefer to keep the Sabbath laws above the need for preserving life. Clearly He saw failing to act to save life as tantamount to destroying life. We must give our Lord's words their due weight here in our decision making. To not act to save life, to excuse ourselves for whatever reason, is effectively destroying life, or, as Mark's record puts it, "to kill" (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9). We can't therefore be passive in this matter. The context of the Lord's statement was in response to questions about whether something was "lawful" or not; it was the age old question, 'Is it a sin to do X, Y or Z?'. His answer was as ever in terms of a principle- that our guiding principle must be the saving and healing and preservation of human life. The attitude of the Pharisees was that the Lord was infringing a letter of the law and therefore was guilty of death. They murdered Him on the Sabbath days; and thus they chose to destroy life rather than save it. The word for "to kill" in Mk. 3:4 is so often used in the Gospels about the killing of Jesus. They failed to take His exhortation. The crucifixion of God's Son was thus a result of legalism; it was because of His attitude to the man with the withered hand that the Pharisees first plotted to kill Jesus (Lk. 6:11). Whatever our individual conscience, let us not "be filled with madness" as the Pharisees were at the fact the Lord approached human behaviour in terms of principles, rather than reducing everything to a common right / wrong scenario. The principle is clearly the saving and preservation and enriching of others'

lives. Surely we should each allow each other to articulate this fundamental issue as we each have occasion to do so.

6:10 *And he looked round about on them all, and then said to him-* The Lord maintained eye-contact with His listeners: Mt. 19:26; Mk. 3:5,34; 5:32; 8:33; 10:21, 23,27; Lk. 6:10; 20:17; 22:61; Jn. 1:42. These are all separate occurrences; the fact is really being emphasized. This paying appropriate attention with eye contact is also a good strategy for matching the silences that occur from time to time in any serious conversation. Most of us can tell when another is thinking by observing the eyes, and when they are not their eyes will tell you.

*Stretch out your hand. And he did so, and his hand was restored-* Matthew uses the same word to describe how the Lord Himself stretched forth *His* hand in order to heal, save and welcome (Mt. 8:3; 12:49; 14:31). Again we are encouraged to perceive a sense of mutuality between the Lord and His people. According to the textus receptus, his hand was restored whole as the other. This detail is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is another touch of the eye witness- the man would've held out both his hands and everyone would've looked from the one to the other, observing they now looked so similar.

6:11 *But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus-* Here we see the common human feature of doing evil in response to the experience of grace. Even amongst believers, and even at judgment day, there is the possibility of the eye becoming evil because of His goodness and grace to others (Mt. 20:15). We see the principle in both secular and church life. Grace shown to others can elicit the worst evil from religious people. We shouldn't be surprised at this phenomenon; but it is the very surprise at encountering it which causes so many to become disillusioned with the church and ultimately with the Lord.

6:12 *And it came to pass in these days that he went out into the mountain to pray; and he continued all night in prayer to God-* Luke alone records the all night prayer. How long have you ever prayed for at one time? Luke as a doctor was struck by the psychological intensity of the Lord in maintaining such lengthy contact with God Almighty. He presumably was praying for wisdom and blessing in this matter of ordaining the twelve, probably with special attention to the issue of calling Judas.

6:13 *And when it was day, he called his disciples-* He was in the mountain, so He called them up into the mountain, and they came down the mountain with Him (:17). In the same way as Moses was called up into the mount to receive his Divine commission, so the Lord Jesus called up to the mount His disciples- implying that they, who represent all of us,

were now a new Moses. Moses was thus an example that challenged those from a Jewish background especially. He was no longer to be gazed at with incomprehension as to his greatness and intimacy with God; he was to become the realistic pattern for all followers of the Lord Jesus, who would meaningfully emulate His closeness to God.

*And he chose from them twelve, whom also he named apostles-* Whoever is sent forth is apostled, and the great commission sends forth all believers. This is not the same incident as the sending forth of the twelve in Matthew 10. But we see how there were various tiers; the crowds, His disciples, the twelve supported by the ministering women; and within them, an inner core of Peter, James and John, with Peter set up as the leader. This kind of hierarchy of leadership was found in the Old Testament too, and is not inappropriate today, if managed with humility and servant-leadership as the dominant spirit. For total equality of role is just unworkable amongst any group of people, and attempts to enforce it often leave Christian communities without the leadership which people need, and the group becomes rudderless.

6:14 *Simon, whom he also named Peter-* Simon was anything but rock-like, but the Lord named him Peter, 'rocky'. He perceived the ultimate stability in Peter's faith, despite all the ups and downs he had. And He sees to the core of each of us too. Peter is always listed first in the lists of apostles, and was the one chosen to be the rock of the early church. But the Lord chose the one who seemed most inappropriate for that work. And so is again exhibited a major theme in the Lord's work amongst men and women like us, that the most inappropriate are often chosen for the job. For the Lord's power is made manifest through our inadequacy.

*And Andrew his brother, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew-* Apparently the same as Nathanael, also mentioned with Philip in Jn. 1:46-51.

6:15 *And Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot-* We see the wide range of men the Lord called into His band; Matthew the tax collector would've been seen as a traitor, whereas the zealots were at the other end of the political spectrum. The way the 12 didn't break up as a group after living together under extreme psychological conditions is a testament to the unifying power of the person of Jesus. The composition of the Lord's body is the same today, including "all [types of] men". Sadly denominationalism and churchianity has led to churches often being clusters of believers having the same socio-economic, racial and personality type positions, rather than being conglomerations of literally all types, of whatever accent and formation.

6:16 *And Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became the betrayer-* "Iscariot" is perhaps 'man of Kerioth.' Kerioth was a small

village in Judea (Josh 15:25). Judas would therefore have been the only Judean. It could be that 'Iscariot' is from *sicarius*, 'dagger-man' or 'assassin'. This would suggest that Judas belonged to what was reckoned to be the most far right of the various resistance groups, the Sicarii (the partisans, cp. Acts 21:38). Again we see the wide range of people the Lord was calling together in order to weld them into one body in Him.

6:17 *And he came down with them and stood on a level place; and a great crowd of his disciples, and a great number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases-* "Came down" heightens the similarity with Moses coming down from the mountain after receiving the law (Ex. 19).

6:18 *And they that were disturbed with unclean spirits were healed-*

6:19 *And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power went out from him and healed them all-* See on Lk. 16:1.

It seems that the apostles were filled with the Spirit in order to do certain acts, and after doing them they were as it were 'drained' of the Spirit, and had to be filled up again. Thus the Lord Jesus felt that something had gone out of Him after performing miracles (Lk. 6:19; 8:46). The non-miraculous work of God through His Spirit would seem to follow a similar pattern. We are "strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man", "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering" (Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:11). God strengthens us deep inside to have that *hupomonè*, that patient endurance, that energy to keep on keeping on. But this strengthening is according to our effort in the appropriate spiritual exercises, and the strength given is not ultimately permanent unless we continue responding to it. and it isn't only a N.T. phenomena; even in earlier times, they that waited on the Lord had their strength renewed, they mounted up on eagle wings, they were made to walk and not faint in God's ways (Is. 40:31). As God doesn't faint or weary, so somehow those who identify their lives with His will also keep on keeping on- even now (Is. 40:31 cp. 29). David felt that his youth was renewed like the eagle's in his repeated experience of God's grace (Ps. 103:5), that his soul was restored (Ps. 23:5), and that a right spirit could be renewed by God within him (Ps. 51:10).

6:20 *Then he lifted up his eyes toward his disciples, and said-* The way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12). The Hebrew phrase "to lift up the eyes" is used very extensively about the Abraham family; and the Lord was the seed of Abraham. Most Bible characters have the term used at most once or twice about them; but the Genesis record emphasizes this characteristic of this family. It's as if we're being bidden to really visualize them as a family, and to enable

this we're even given an insight into their body language. Consider the emphasis on the way this family had of lifting up their eyes:

Lot lifted up his eyes (Gen. 13:10)

Abraham lifted up his eyes (Gen. 13:14)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and noticed the Angels (Gen. 18:2)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place of sacrifice (Gen. 22:4)

Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the ram caught (Gen. 22:13)

Isaac lifted up his eyes and saw camels coming on which Rebekah was riding (Gen. 24:63)

Rebekah, as part of a marriage made in Heaven, lifted up *her* eyes and saw Isaac at the same moment (Gen. 24:64)

Jacob lifted up his eyes and saw the vision of the speckled cattle (twice recorded- Gen. 31:10,12)

Jacob lifted up his eyes and saw Esau coming (Gen. 33:1)

Esau lifted up his eyes and saw Jacob's family (Gen. 33:5)

Jacob's sons lifted up their eyes and saw the traders coming (Gen. 37:25)

Joseph lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin (Gen. 43:29)

Of course the classic epitome of this feature is when Abraham lifts up his eyes to Heaven and is asked to count the stars, and there and then believes God's word of promise that "so shall thy seed be". Yet *we*, as Abraham's family, his children by faith, are likewise asked [with the same Hebrew words] to lift up *our* eyes to Heaven and consider the stars, and take strength from the fact that their creator is our God (Is. 40:26; 51:6; 60:4). Surrounded by huge crowds, the Lord focused upon teaching the disciples. This was typical of Him, and occurred also at the time of the sermon on the mount.

*Blessed are you poor-* The poverty in view is spiritual poverty; those who wish to be spiritually rich but are not. It is no blessing to simply be poor materially; for such poverty can distract people from spiritual focus just as much as wealth can. Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon, waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are "the poor" (Gk. 'the crouchers'), cringing in utter spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3). And yet we have a terrible tendency to only occasionally *really* pray, content with prayer on a surface level. The Lord's parables invite us to see ourselves as, e.g., the desperate widow woman pleading for deliverance from her oppressive landlord (Lk. 18:3).

*For yours is the kingdom of God-* The Lord's prayer used the same phrase "Yours is the Kingdom" in addressing God. But "Blessed are you poor, for *yours* is the Kingdom of God". The Lord thereby assures us that the Father wants to give *His* Kingdom to those who are poor in spirit, to the broken, to the self-doubters, the uncertain, those uncomfortable with themselves, the unbearably and desperately lonely, the awkwardly spoken... the poor in spirit. Those who would be the very last to believe that God would give *them* what is evidently *His* Kingdom. But not only *will*

the Father do this, but Jesus stresses that it *is* ours right now. The certainty of the glory that will be revealed for us means that we cope better with suffering; as Paul writes, they "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

The similarities with the sermon on the mount are many; but this sermon is delivered on the plain. The Lord is repeating in the Jerusalem area what He had taught in Galilee.

6:21 *Blessed are you that hunger now; for you shall be filled*-According to the beatitudes, the hunger is a spiritual hunger after righteousness (Mt. 5:6). "*Blessed* (Lk. 1:48) are they which do *hunger* (Lk. 1:53) and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be *filled* (Lk. 1:53)" (Mt. 5:6) shows the Lord clearly alluding to His mother's own description of herself. It's as if He stands up there before the hushed crowd and lays down His manifesto with those words. This was the keynote of what He had to say to humanity. Everybody was waiting to hear what His message really was. And this is what He said. He was saying 'This, guys, is what I essentially and most fundamentally seek to inspire in you'. And He saw His dear mother as the epitome of the converts He was seeking to make. I lay great store by this allusion. For it makes Mary, at least at the time of the Angel's visit, truly our pattern. She heard the glad tidings and believed that word in faith, holding on to it in her heart (Lk. 8:15,21). She was a model for all who hear the Gospel. It could even be that the language of Lk. 1:32,33,35 is framed in such a way as to make Mary appear to be the first person who heard the gospel about Jesus.

*Blessed are you that weep now; for you shall laugh*- See on 1:53. Associated in the Old Testament with mourning for sin (Ex. 33:4,5; Ezra 10:6; Neh. 8:9; Ps. 38:5,6). The time of God's grace was extended to those who mourned for their sins (Is. 61:2,3; 66:10). Such Godly sorrow is the sorrow of repentance (2 Cor. 7:10); and the laughter in view is therefore the utter joy of good conscience with God through His forgiveness.

6:22 *Blessed are you, when men shall hate you, and when they shall reject you, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake*- 'Reject' is literally 'to drive away' (Mt. 1:23; 23:34), maybe carrying the idea of excommunication. Being thrown out of the synagogue was a major and frequent occurrence for many who came to Jesus (Jn. 9:22). There are Old Testament connections between persecution and suffering for sin (Dt. 30:1-7), so the Lord could also have in view, as in the Beatitudes, that He is offering blessing and happiness for the messed up sinners who are suffering in this life for their sins.

This is quoted by Peter in 1 Pet. 4:14 where he says that we are blessed / happy if we are reviled for the sake of Christ's Name. The implication is

that persecution, slander and serious opposition is inevitable for all who will follow Christ. Yet when these things happen, we seem to be shocked and surprised. Paul's extraordinary ability to rejoice in his trials seems to have been rooted in his sustained reflection upon these verses. These words are alluded to in at least 5 verses in his epistles. When Corinth reviled him (2 Cor. 7:4), Paul saw this as being reviled and persecuted after the pattern of Lk. 6:22.

*6:23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy; for your reward is great in heaven. For in the same manner did their fathers treat the prophets-* Again seeking to challenge the prevailing views of the Jewish leadership, the Lord invited His humble fishermen-followers to see themselves as the great prophets of old being persecuted by a wicked Israel. The language of persecution is also rooted very much in the language and experience of the prophets. The similar language in Mk. 13:8-11 and Lk. 21:12-18 suggests the same. Again, just as the Lord has challenged his secular, nothing-special followers to see themselves as Moses, now He invites them to see themselves as the prophets. And so a theme develops in the Lord's teaching- that He is seeking to place the mantle of Moses, David and the prophets upon ordinary, sinful members of spiritual society, seeking to show them their huge potential significance in God's program. And that impression must come home to us too in our situations, no longer considering that spiritual heroics and work for God are somehow for 'the others', the leaders.

*6:24 But woe to you that are rich! For you have received your consolation-* Is the "woe!" in Lk. 6:24-26; 11:42-52 an imprecation ['woe to'] or a lament ['alas!']? Luke has more to say about the "rich" than any other of the gospels. The implication is that the comfort is for those who are poor in spirit. The comfort offered in Isaiah was specifically comfort for sinners who realized their desperation (Is. 12:1; 40:1). We noted on Matthew 4 that the Lord presented the way that John had prepared the way for Him in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah 40, which spoke of 'comfort' to God's doubting people. If this comfort were accepted, then the glory would come to Zion and John's work would have prepared a highway of repentant people over which the Lord Jesus could have come to Zion and established the Kingdom there and then. Comfort to the mourners was one of Isaiah's descriptions of that possible Kingdom. It could have all happened in the first century, but Israel would not- and so the final fulfilment of this comfort will be at Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom fully on earth. "Be comforted" may be a prophesy of the Comforter which was to give a measure of comfort even in this life (Jn. 14:16).

*6:25 Woe to you, you that are full now! For you shall hunger. Woe to you*

*that laugh now! For you shall mourn and weep-* The wealth, laughter and fullness refers to spiritual confidence of the type seen in the Jewish religious leadership. The gospel is good news for those who mourn for their sins, and hunger to be righteous. Those who considered themselves spiritually rich would experience the mourning and weeping associated with condemnation at the last day. Either we will mourn now in repentance, or we will mourn at the judgment (Mt. 8:12 etc.). Having foretold the inevitable coming of judgment day, Yahweh Himself pleads with Israel: "Therefore also *now*... turn ye even to me... with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). See on Mt. 3:11.

*6:26 Woe to you, when all men shall speak well of you! For in the same manner did their fathers do to the false prophets-* The Lord assumes that His followers will not be people of spotless reputation, but will be as unpopular as the Old Testament prophets. He was at this point largely appealing to secular, irreligious people who wanted to be spiritual but couldn't so far get their act together- rather than seeking to tweak the theology of those who claimed to be believers already. And this should be the focus of our outreach too. But just as in this verse He assumes His people will not be well thought of in society, so He assumes that they shall each one be as the true prophets of Israel. He reasons as if all His followers shall have a prophetic ministry.

*6:27 But I say to you that hear: Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you-* We tend to love in response to others' love. But the love which the Lord has in mind is the love which is an act of the will, consciously effected towards the *unloving*. This love of enemies is specifically exemplified in :35 as lending without expecting anything back. It's not usual for an enemy to try to borrow from us; but I suggest that the lending in view is that of forgiveness. For debt is so often used as a metaphor for sin.

It was the Essenes in their *Rule Of The Community* who taught that Essenes must yearly chant curses upon their enemies. The Lord's attitude to the Essenes is a case study in bridge building- developing what we have in common with our target audience, and yet through that commonality addressing the issues over which we differ. The Dead Sea scrolls reveal that the terms ""poor in spirit" and "poor" are technical terms used only by the Essenes to describe themselves". So when the Lord encouraged us to be "poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3), He was commending the Essene position. Likewise when He praised those who were eunuchs for God's Kingdom (Mt. 19:10-12), He was alluding to the Essenes, who were the only celibate group in first century Israel. And yet lepers were anathema to the Essenes, and the Lord's staying in the home of Simon the leper (Mk. 14:3) was a purposeful affront to Essene thinking. The parable of the Good Samaritan has been seen as another purposeful attack upon them; likewise the Lord's teaching: "You have heard that it

was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy" (Mt. 5:43). So the Lord within His teaching as a whole, both commended and challenged the Essenes; His bridge building didn't involve just accepting their position.

6:28 *Bless those that curse you, pray for those that mistreat you-* Praying for our enemies and abusers, not wishing a curse upon them but rather a blessing, sounds like Job (Job 31:30). 'Blessing' has Biblical connection with the ideas of forgiveness and salvation. There would be no point in praying for forgiveness for the obviously impenitent unless God might actually grant it. This opens huge possibilities and potentials to us. God is willing to forgive people for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others (Mk. 2:5). Jesus isn't simply telling us to vaguely pray for our enemies because it is psychologically good for us and eases our pain a bit. Genuine prayer for abusers really has the possibility of being heard- for God is willing to save people for the sake of our prayers. Otherwise, this exhortation to do good to abusers through praying for their blessing would be rather meaningless. 'Cursing' likewise tended to carry the sense of 'May you be condemned at the day of judgment'. Those who condemn others will be condemned (Mt. 7:1 etc.)- and yet we can pray for their blessing. It is perhaps only our prayers and desire for their salvation which can over-ride the otherwise certain connection between condemning others and being condemned. This gives those condemned and abused by others so much work to do. In fact, so amazing are the possibilities that that alone is therapeutic. Moses' praying for Pharaoh in Ex. 9:28,29 is perhaps the Old Testament source of Christ's words. Let's not read those records as implying that Moses simply uttered a few words to God, and then each of the plagues was lifted. There was an element of real fervency in Moses' prayers- which may well be lacking in ours. This is surely an example of genuinely praying for our enemies.

Curse [condemn]... hate... spitefully use [slander]... persecute [chase out- excommunicate] the terms used here are very applicable to attitudes from some members of God's people to others- first century Israel, in the first context, and the Christian church in the longer term context. The language is not so applicable to persecution at the hands of the unbelieving world. Likewise the commands to pray for spiritual blessing and acceptance of our abusers is surely more appropriate to prayers for those who are bitter misbelievers than for complete unbelievers who profess no desire to please God.

6:29 *To him that hits you on the cheek offer also the other-* You singular. Time and again the Sermons on the Mount and Plain seem to take a broad sweep in its record of the Lord's teaching to us all; and then He suddenly focuses in on the individual. The AV brings this out well through the use of "you" (plural) and "thee" (singular): "Blessed are you poor... love your enemies... to him who strikes thee on the cheek...". Note how many times

there is this change of pronoun in Luke 6. Clearly the Lord wants us to see our collective standing before Him, and yet not to overlook the purely personal nature of His appeal to us individually. The Lord was smitten on the cheek but enquired why He was being smitten, rather than literally turning the other cheek. But to do this would be so humiliating for the aggressor that it would be a far more effective resistance of evil than anything else. The power in the confrontation is now with the one who turns the other cheek. S/he is calling the shots, not the beater. The idea of not resisting evil and offering the other cheek we normally apply to suffering loss from the world without fighting for our rights. Yet Paul took this as referring to the need to not retaliate to the harmful things done to us by members of the ecclesia (Rom. 12:16,17; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 5:15). When struck on the right cheek- which was a Semitic insult to a heretic- they were to not respond and open themselves up for further insult [surely a lesson for those brethren who are falsely accused of wrong beliefs]. And yet the compassion of Jesus shines through both His parables and the records of His words; as does His acceptance of people for who they were. People were relaxed with Him because they could see He had no hidden agenda. He wasn't going to use them for His own power trip.

*And from him that takes away your cloak- withhold not your coat also-* The simple principle 'Do not resist wrong judgment of you' is a very large ask. Even in this life, truth often comes out. And if we believe in the ultimate justice of the final judgment, we will not for ever be going around correcting others' misjudgements and wrong impressions of us. That is something I have had to deeply learn in my own life. It was forbidden by the Law to keep a man's outer garment overnight (Ex. 22:26,27). But the Lord taught *whilst the law was still in operation* that we should be willing to give it up, and even offer it. The threatened man could have quoted the Law and kept his clothing. But the Lord bids us go to a higher level, beyond using God's law to uphold our own rights. And in this He raises a vital if difficult principle: Don't always enforce what Biblical rights you have against your brother. Don't rush to your own defence and justification even if Scripture is on your side. Live on the level of true love and non-resistance to evil. In this case the idea would be that even if someone amongst God's people does something unBiblical to us, clearly breaking God's laws, we are still to not resist evil but rather by our grace to them, shame them into repentance.

6:30 *Give to everyone who asks of you, from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back-* This parallels the Lord's teaching that we receive from God whatever we ask. But that is not to be taken literally. It is paramountly true in spiritual terms. 'Debt' is used as a metaphor for sin. The idea is used in :35 for forgiving sin. Likewise the Lord's teaching

here likely has context and parameters to it. The Lord is teaching not to resist evil; for the 'asking' of us is parallel to taking away our goods.

*6:31 And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise-* This is another way of saying 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. The Greek for 'do to you' recurs in Mt. 18:35 where we read how God shall 'do to you' if you do not forgive your brother. We also find the phrase in Mt. 25:40,45- 'whatever you do' to Christ's brethren, you do to Him and shall receive from Him accordingly. It is true that what goes around, comes around- so it's best to treat others as you would like to be treated. But that kind of truth is expressed in almost every religious and cultural system of the world. My sense is that the Lord is not merely repeating conventional, folksy wisdom, but rather is elevating it to a far higher and more deeply internal, spiritual level. For this is His style throughout the Sermons on the mount and plain. The recurrence of the phrase 'whatever you do' in Mt. 25:40,45 teaches that whatever we do (or do not do) to others, we do to Christ personally. And in that dimension of life, the 'come back' of our actions will not simply be in this life, but more importantly, at the last day. Judgment day, either explicitly or implicitly, forms a major theme in the Lord's teaching. If He is indeed teaching that what we do to others is done to Him and therefore will have its response at the day of judgment, rather than merely in this life as folksy wisdom teaches, then indeed we can understand His comment in Mt. 7:12: "For this is the law and the prophets". The law and the prophets do indeed teach that human behaviour, especially that done to others, shall come to final judgment in the last day. But I would not say that 'what goes around, comes around' is exactly their major and noteworthy theme, true as that bit of folksy wisdom is.

*6:32 For if you love those that love you, what praise do you have? For even sinners love those that love them-* Taking responsibility for others is often thankless. Our human dysfunction cries out for affirmation, and we tend not to do those things for which we are not thanked. This is one of the most radical aspects of our calling as followers of Christ- to serve without being thanked. Belief in God's judgment helps us with this. For all our works will be rewarded in some sense by Him at the last day. If we love those that love us, we have no "thank" (AV) or "praise"- but we will have "thank", or "praise of God" ultimately. And this is what ultimately matters. This speaks of receiving "thank" for making the conscious effort to love the unlovable. The Greek for "thank" or "praise" is *charis*, normally translated "grace", and often connected with the help of the Spirit which is given to us in response to our own efforts.

*6:33 And if you do good to those that do good to you, what praise do you have? For even sinners do the same-* There is no *charis*, no grace, in loving those who love us; grace is found in doing good to those who do not do good to us. Too easily, believing communities can become self-

help clubs, whereby we do good to those who do good to us. And that is the way of the world, of secular society. The call of grace is to do good to those who are not of us, and who are against us.

6:34 *And if you lend to those of whom you hope to receive, what praise do you have? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive again as much-* As noted on :32 and :33, there is no grace [s.w. "praise"] in giving when we hope to receive back in this life. This is the way of secular society and groups within it. From whom do we receive grace or praise? Surely from the Father, the source of grace. Secular people do good (:33) and lend to others because they hope to receive again "as much", literally, the same kind of thing. Our spiritual investment is of an altogether different character. We will not receive back in this life from those we give to. But we are banking in Heaven, and at judgment day, will receive back the grace we are so desperately in need of. Then we shall receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5), according to the parable, the Lord will go through our good works to weak people and praise us for them. We will indeed "receive" for what we do, but not "as much", not in the same coin, not things of the same nature which we gave. There is a radical exchange going on- our lending to others, be it literally or in terms of the gift of forgiveness, time and grace, shall be recompensed- but not from them, and on a far more wonderful level.

6:35 *But love your enemies, and do good and lend, never despairing, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be sons of the Most High. For He is kind toward the unthankful and evil-* See on Mt. 5:45. The Lord sort to inculcate in His followers His same positive spirit. We must love our enemies "never despairing". To never give up with people, for all the losses, the casualties, the hurt... never despairing of humanity. This was and is the spirit of Jesus. Debt is a common metaphor for sin, being in need of forgiveness. The constant lending we are called to, not expecting repayment but all the same placing those lent to in an ever greater debt to us, corresponds more accurately with the experience of forgiving people than it does with lending of material things. To lend without hoping for anything back ["never despairing"] is quite some challenge. This appears to be the pattern of God's kindness; He is kind for the sake of it, with no hope of anything back. And yet what joy we must give Him when we form the habit of regular thanks before food, and seek to appreciate His kindness. Worthiness of the recipient is not the way of grace, and the teaching here is in conscious contrast to the Jewish idea, soon to be recorded by Luke, that a man was worthy of a miracle because he had been generous to a Jewish community (7:4). The paradox of this teaching is that although we should serve for nothing, with no hope for anything back, there will in fact be a great reward prepared for us. Although not in this life, nor in secular terms, as noted on :34.

6:36 *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful*- Quite simply, who God is should inspire us to be like Him; to copy His characteristics [the things of His Name] in our personalities. We must be "perfect" as our Father is; "be holy", because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16); "kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God forgave... be you therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 4:32; 5:1); "merciful, as your Father is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Prov. 19:11 RV uses language frequently applied to Yahweh Himself and applies it to the wise man: "The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression". And thus Phinehas was commended for being "jealous with my jealousy" (Num. 25:11 RV)- his emotion at that time was a mirror of that of God Himself.

Not only was language re-interpreted by the Christian movement. Whole concepts were reoriented. Holiness in the sense of separation from the unclean had been a major theme in the Mosaic Law, and it figured largely in the theology of the Pharisees. But the Lord quoted "Be holy because I, Yahweh your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2) as "Be merciful, even as your father [in heaven- AV] is merciful". To be merciful to those who sin is now the true holiness- not merely separation from them and condemnation of their ways. Note, too, how He invites us to interpret the Yahweh as "father", rather than transliterating the Name.

6:37 *Judge not, and you shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven*- This confirms the suggestion so far made in commentary on this chapter; that the lending and giving in view is particularly that of forgiveness, unconditionally granted. For Paul, "judge not..." echoed in his mind throughout the years; thus it is at the basis of Rom. 2:1; the whole of Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 4:3,5. The Lord's teaching about judging does not in fact say that the act of condemning our brother is in itself a sin- it's simply that we must cast out the beam from our own eye first, and then we can judge our brother by pointing out to him the splinter in his eye. But the Lord tells us not to judge because He foresaw that we would never completely throw out the beam from our own eye. His command not to judge / condemn at all was therefore in this sense a concession to our inevitable weakness (:41). The commentary of James on this is interesting: "Don't speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4:11). In what sense is to judge / condemn our brother to judge the law? And which law? Maybe James considered Lk. 6:37 and Mt. 7:1 to be so fundamental a part of "the law of Christ" that he refers to it as "the law". See on Mt. 7:24. The Lord had taught clearly that under His law, to condemn meant being condemned. Yet there were those in James' readership, as there are today, who think they can go ahead and condemn others. Seeing the

Lord's law is so clear, James is saying that effectively they are condemning the law of Jesus, placing themselves as judges over His law by deciding that they can break it at will.

We observe that not forgiving is parallel here to condemning and judging. We are setting ourselves up as judge of others if we refuse to forgive. Forgiveness is not the same as trust, but it is clearly required- otherwise we are condemning. If we assume that all our brethren shall be saved [and seeing we can't prejudge the judgment, we have to assume this, as Paul did about Corinth], then we assume that whatever sins they have committed against us will be forgiven. Therefore we must forgive them, acting in harmony with the Lord's position to them. In this lies the connection between not forgiving and condemning. If we refuse to condemn them, then we must forgive them. And the nature of the logic demands that we are to grant that forgiveness to any whom the Lord will not condemn, and so the forgiveness in view is to be granted without any angst about whether or not the person has repented. That is not for us to judge; it is for us to forgive. The logic of the whole argument requires this. There are passages which picture a person sinning against us and saying they repent and then being forgiven; but their purpose is to teach that we are to forgive when they do that, even if their repentance appears insincere; but we are not thereby taught not to forgive unless they repent. We are being presented in those passages with a theoretical situation, and told to forgive even if repentance seems sincere. But the logic here in Lk. 6:37 is to forgive in any case; for all "in Christ" are not condemned and therefore forgiven.

Because of the principle that we shall be condemned if we condemn, we need to remember that we will receive according to the measure we use to people in this life. Again, a direct connection is made between our judgment experience before Jesus at the last day, and our attitude to others now.

*6:38 Give; and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they pour into your lap. For with what measure you use, it shall be measured to you again-* We are to give expecting nothing again, and we do not get such generous response to our generosity from men in this life. So I suggest the reference is to judgment day, and the "men" refer to Angels. As men gather in a net and sort out the fish, so the angels will at judgment day (Mt. 13:47-50). "Men (angels) gather (the branches), and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6). This same equation of men and angels is seen in Lk. 6:38, this time concerning how the angels will mete out rewards as well as punishment at the judgment; for the language here is very much the language of judgment to come (Lk. 6:38 cp. Mt. 7:1,2). This association of "men" (angels) with the judgment is fitting, seeing that our guardian

angel will have been with us through every up and down of life, and shall come with the Lord Jesus to our judgment. See on Lk. 12:48.

We might have expected Him to say: 'Give generously, with a good, running over measure, and this is what you will receive in return'. But He doesn't. He says simply "Give"; and then we will be given to in a generous measure, because with what measure we use in our giving, we will receive. Thinking it through, He means surely that "giving", by His definition, means a generous, well packed, abundant giving; for that *is* Christian giving. And note that the context of Lk. 6:38 is the Lord talking about not being critical and judgmental of others, but rather forgiving and accepting them. It is our 'giving' in this sense which is to be so full and generous. Only God's grace / giving can inspire this attitude within us, as we live hemmed in by the people of a materialistic, mean world, where nobody takes up a cross for anyone else. This is why Paul makes a play on the word 'grace' when writing to the Corinthians about giving; for *charis*, "grace", means 'giving'. He urges them to not receive God's grace in vain, but rather, motivated by it, to give grace to others (2 Cor. 6:1; 8:6,7,19).

*6:39 And he spoke also a parable to them: Can the blind guide the blind? Shall they not both fall into a pit?*- The blind can lead the blind into the ditch, i.e. to be 'rooted up' in condemnation (Mt. 15:13,14 cp. 13:29). And yet *now* in this day of marvellous opportunity, we can lift both ourselves and others out of that pit of condemnation (Mt. 12:11). Some of those who are now 'rooted up', i.e. condemned as they would be in the future judgment (Mt. 13:28), who are "wandering" as the rejected will in the last day, can still be saved from this by us pulling them out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 12,22). Men can escape from the "damnation of hell" in which they are in (Mt. 23:33). Herein lies the urgency of our task in both personal repentance and pastoral work. But we note too the responsibility of leaders- they can lead others to condemnation. We do well to analyse our leaders. When the Lord elsewhere spoke of the blind leading the blind, He went on to tell the story of the partially sighted man who tries to remove what he perceives as a splinter of wood from his brother's eye (:39-42). The implication is that we are all blind, and need leadership- but by the Lord, not by each other. And He is saying the same thing here in Mt. 15. By telling the disciples not to be led by the Pharisees in order to avoid falling into condemnation, He is effectively implying that the disciples were blind- for if the blind lead the blind, then they will fall into the ditch of condemnation.

The pit is that of condemnation. And yet the Lord likens Himself to a man who lifts His sheep out of the ditch / pit (s.w. Mt. 12:11). We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was, and yet be saved out of it. Just as some of those blind Scribes and Pharisees were saved.

6:40 *The disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is perfected, shall be as his teacher*- The Lord is partly speaking to the possible desire in some of the disciples to be martyrs for His cause. Peter's attitude in Gethsemane was clearly of that nature, and some of the disciples came from radicalized, fanatical backgrounds. Martyrdom was a common concept in the first century, and the Lord's warning to flee persecution, to bring about a quiet revolution rather than a political one, was aimed at warning against any desire for a quick, glamorous death for the sake of the Kingdom. In the context, He has warned them to endure persecution. He could be saying that the game plan was that *He* was to die, but *they* were to seek to preserve their lives so that they could make a longer and more effective witness to Him. They were not 'above' Him- He was the one who had to die as the perfect sacrifice, not them. They were to be 'as' Him in terms of personality, and be satisfied with that- it was to be "enough" for them to bear His reproach (Mt. 10:25). The Lord elsewhere taught Peter that the time for martyrdom would indeed come for Peter, when he was "perfected" or matured- but not right then. So there is the possibility that the Lord is implying 'You are not at this stage *huper* ("above") Me, for the moment, focus on being "as" Me, as disciples learning to copy their teacher'. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that Paul later writes that we are indeed to be *huper* Christ, in the sense of being instead of Him, for His sake, in our witness. Thus we are to preach "*huper* Christ... in Christ's stead [*huper* again]" (2 Cor. 5:20), suffering in the work of preaching *huper* Christ (2 Cor. 12:10; Phil. 1:29; Col. 1:24), giving our lives *huper* Christ (Acts 15:26), in response to Christ's death *huper* us (Rom. 5:8 and often). So when the Lord taught that the disciples were not to give their lives *huper* Him their Lord and Master, He might have meant 'at this time'. The time would come, but for then, they were to focus on learning of Him.

Today, students are 'trained' to think for themselves, be creative, develop their own opinions, push forward their own independent research, using question / problem-based learning as a paradigm for their education. 'Education' in the first century wasn't like that at all. The idea was that "every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). The idea was that a person born into a certain social situation was trained to take their place in society, given that 'station and place' into which they had been born. Initiative in that sense was not encouraged; it was all about training up a person to correctly fulfil societies' expectation of them. The idea of being personally taught by the invisible Master / teacher Jesus, becoming like Him rather than like the person whom society expected, being given talents by Him which we are to trade and multiply at our initiative (Mt. 25:15-28)... this was all totally counter-cultural stuff. What was so vital in the Mediterranean world was that a person achieved conformity to accepted values. Cicero advised that in any good presentation of a legal case or encomium, emotions and passions shouldn't be referred to. Individualism was seen as a threat to tradition

and the collective society. The huge New Testament emphasis on becoming disciples, learners, of an invisible Lord, Master and teacher located in Heaven, serving Him alone, worried about *His* standards, perceptions and judgment of us- that was and is so totally opposite to the expectations of society. People were educated to be embedded in society, rather than to come out of their world and live in the new world in which Christ was the light, and all things were made new in a new creation, a new set of values.

6:41 *And why do you see the splinter that is in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye?*- The Lord prefaces this mini-parable by saying that the blind can't lead the blind. For Him, a man with even slightly impaired vision was effectively blind. In this very context He speaks of the need to be "perfected... as his master". Only the perfect, by implication, can criticize their brethren. And the final reason He gives for not attempting to cast out the plank from our brother's eye is that "For a good tree brings not forth corrupt fruit". This is rather hard to understand in the context. But on reflection, it seems that He is teaching that if we are good trees, we will have no corrupt fruit, no splinters in our eye- and because none of us are like this, there is corrupt fruit on each of us, we aren't perfect as our Master, therefore we shouldn't think of trying to cast out the plank from our brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-43). And of course He bids us to be perfect as our Father is. These high standards of demand were mixed with an incredible grace. Only a man who was evidently perfect could speak like this with any realness or credibility. Otherwise His words would just have been seen as the ravings of a weirdo. But there was a realness to His perfection that made and makes His demands so piercingly appropriate to us. The way He handled His perfection is a wonderful insight into His character. He knew that He was without sin; and He knew that the life He lived moment by moment was to be the pattern for all God's people. Yet somehow, He handled this in a manner which was never arrogant, never proud, and never off-putting to sinners; but rather, actually inviting to them.

This continues the context about judging. Our attitude to others will be the Lord's attitude to us at the last day. If we are hyper-critical of others, then this is how the Lord will look upon us. If *He* should mark iniquity in us, none could stand (Ps. 130:3)- and we should struggle with the natural human tendency to mark iniquity in others. The question 'Why...?' is answered by the Lord in verse 42- He perceived that we excuse our judgmentalness and critical attitudes with the excuse that we actually want to assist the poor person who is the object of our critical gaze. How many times have we heard the bitterest, most carping criticism of others- rounded off with the excuse 'I actually really feel so sorry for him'. This is the very mentality the Lord is bringing to our attention. He bids us realize how we justify critical attitudes towards others on the basis that we kind ourselves that we want to help them.

The splinter is literally, a twig. Both a twig and a beam are all of the same material- wood. If the Lord was indeed a woodworker, He would have prepared this teaching during meditation in His workplace. The point is, all our faults are of the same essence. The problem is that although we have been called out of darkness / blindness into the light of life, we are still blind in so many ways- even though blindness is a feature of the unsaved, and ignorance of God is the basis of His anger with men (2 Thess. 1:8). Crystal clear teaching of Jesus relating to wealth, brotherly love, personal forgiveness, the vital unity of His church, personal purity... these all go ignored in some way by each of us, and therefore by us as a community. The Lord gently warns us that we are *all* likely to be blind in some way- why, He asks, are we so keen to comment on our brother's blindness / darkness, when we too have such limited vision (Mt. 7:3)? We can read the same passages time and again, and fail to let them really register.

"Consider not" is alluded to by James. James is full of references to the Sermon, and James 1:23,24 repeat this Greek word for "consider". James warns that we can be like the man who considers / beholds his face in a mirror and then carries on with life, immediately forgetting what he has seen of himself. It's not that we are totally, blissfully unaware of our faults. We see / consider them, but for a fleeting moment. And then live as if we have not seen them. The Lord is telling us to indeed see / consider our own planks. The idea seems to be that the plank in our own eye is our judgmental attitude towards our brother. This is what damages our vision; John teaches that we cannot see where we are walking if we hate our brother in our heart (1 Jn. 2:11). If we are without this major impediment to our vision, then maybe we will be able to assist others with removing small parts [a twig] of the major problems [a beam] which we have ourselves overcome.

6:42 *Or how can you say to your brother: Brother, let me cast out the splinter that is in your eye- when you yourself do not perceive the beam that is in your own eye? You hypocrite! Cast out first the beam out of your own eye, and then shall you see clearly to cast out the splinter that is in your brother's eye-* The Lord foresaw the problems we would have within our community; from the schisms of the first century to the struggles of latter day believers. Consider the story He told of the carpenter with a beam in his own eye who is so keen to extract the splinter from the eye of his fellow worker (note how he almost forces himself upon his brother to do this!). There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. In this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying:

'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, its presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. 'The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story of the two carpenters. Significantly they both had wood in their eye- as if a brother will tend to seek to correct another brother who has in essence the same weaknesses, but the 'helping' brother considers that the other brother's is so much greater than his. Perhaps the Lord intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can...

If we condemn ourselves in our self-examination, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). We are to most importantly [Gk. *proton*] "cast out" the beam from our own eye (Lk. 6:42)- and the Lord uses the same word about the 'casting forth' of the rejected at the last day. We are to judge our own weaknesses as worthy of condemnation. See on Lk. 18:10.

6:43 *For there is no good tree that brings forth corrupt fruit, nor a corrupt tree that brings forth good fruit-* We take a third road of indifferent tolerance to far too many. Having spoken of the need to tolerate our brother, the Lord Jesus repeated His common theme: that there is no third road. There's no third position. Either we love our brother, and bring forth good fruit; or we don't get down to it, and bring forth bad fruit. We can't sometimes bring forth good, sometimes bad. At heart, we are either loving or selfishly hateful. Anything less than following Yahweh with all our heart is seen as doing evil in His eyes (1 Kings 11:6).

Fruit on a transformed person is obvious and visible. If we are to use the presence or absence of fruit as a basis for perceiving false teachers, then we will have no problem at all discerning who is of the Lord and who isn't. And yet this very issue of deciding on others' status has been fatally divisive and destructive for the Lord's church. Statements of faith are analysed, and the teaching of others is watchfully dissected to see if it fits that given statement- in order to decide whether someone is 'in' or 'out'. The Lord foresaw that tendency, for it was the tendency of the scribes too. And instead He offers us this other way, elevating spirituality to the highest level- whoever has the fruits "cannot" be a bad tree. The issue of 'fruit' therefore becomes the key methodology through which to make the judgments which we are called to make in life. The attitude is often

expressed that 'Well they may be very nice Christians and all that, but they do not understand the Truth about... [issue X]'. The Lord is tackling that mentality head on, by saying that this "cannot" be the case; if the fruit is there, then they are a good tree, whatever misunderstandings they may have (and we all have them).

6:44 *For each tree is known by its own fruit-* The Lord knows the evil hearts of people- but we can't see their hearts, and so we shall know them by their external fruits. The need for fruit as a sign of repentance had been a theme in John's teaching (Mt. 3:8,10), and the Lord in His Sermon is often building on John's words. The Lord's concern is about those who appear to have accepted His message, dressing as sheep, and yet are in fact completely false. The whole thrust of His Sermon is that acceptance of Him produces a change in human life; there must be fruit. And we take a simple lesson from that- if we are to be able to tell whether someone is a genuine Christian or not by whether their fruits are visible, we have to ask ourselves whether our lives are so markedly different from unbelievers. There is to be something about us, fruit hanging on us, which clearly differentiates us from the unbelieving world. The difference has got to be fairly obvious, because the Lord is here teaching that we can easily discern whether someone purporting to be spiritual is indeed so because the fruits of it will be evident. Therefore there will not be any debate about whether someone is in the wolf / false prophet category- because they either have the fruits of the Spirit, the signs of the transformed life, or they do not. And the difference will be obvious. And yet endless energy has been expended trying to judge false prophets according to the content of their Biblical exposition and teaching. The Lord, however, teaches that the litmus test is in their life, rather than in their intellectual position.

*For from thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush do they gather grapes-* The idea is 'Of course not'. The Lord's point is that spiritual fruit is obvious, it cannot be hidden, like a city set on a hill. If there are grapes, the blessed fruit of the new covenant, on a person- then for sure they are not a thorn bush, with all the associations between thorns and cursing. In Mt. 12:33 the Lord makes an apparently obvious point- a good tree has good fruit, a bad tree has bad fruit. But the point is that we can easily, clearly tell whether someone has the fruit of the transformed life or not. There is no argument about it, because the fruit of the transformed life, lived according to this Sermon on the Mount, is public and visible. The seed of the Gospel which is sown by Jesus either brings forth fruit, or it doesn't (Mt. 13:8,26). So much angst about labelling individuals as false teachers is rendered unnecessary if we take this approach. And the false teachers with whom the later New Testament letters engage are teaching a false way of life, and Jude, Peter and John

especially point out that their way of life indicates that they are false teachers.

Figs are associated with spiritual fruit (Mt. 21:19; 24:32), whereas thistles, like thorns, are associated with the curse (Gen. 3:18 "thorns and thistles"; s.w. Heb. 6:8 "that which bears thorns and thistles is rejected"). The point is, that the difference between the accepted and the condemned is apparent even in this life, because the fruit of the transformed life simply has to be seen publicly on people. This is perhaps the Lord's expansion upon His command not to judge / condemn. He's saying that we should not, however, walk around life blind and imperceptive, but rather take good notice of the presence or absence of fruit on a person.

The Lord puts it slightly another way in Lk. 6:44 when He says that men don't "gather" good fruit from a corrupt tree. The language of gathering is very much that of judgment to come; and yet the fruit is produced and gathered now, in the words / fruit that comes out of our mouth. This is why right now we can judge a false teacher, by his corrupt words [this is one of the contexts of the Lord's words about corrupt trees and fruit- we see the fruit *now*]. The corrupt man *will* speak villainy (Is. 32:6). But corrupt words don't just mean expletives- the false teacher would be too smart to use them. He comes in sheep's clothing. But Lk. 6:41-44 gives us an example of "corrupt" words; words which create a corrupting spiritual influence in a man or in a community. One may say to his brother that he must cast out the splinter from his eye, although he has a plank in his own. And the Lord goes on to say that a good tree doesn't bring forth corrupt fruit. The corrupt fruit, as in the above passages, means 'corrupt words'. And in Lk. 6:45 the Lord concludes by saying that "for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". The corrupt fruit are the corrupt words of Lk. 6:42- saying, 'My brother, I'm very sorry, but I just have to correct you, you are so obviously wrong and stupid to walk round with a splinter in your eye, I can correct your spiritual vision, because I see perfectly. At the moment your spiritual perception ['eye] is just hopeless'. The Lord understood 'the eye' as ones' spiritual vision (Mt. 6:22,23). These kind of words, in essence, are the real leaven; they corrupt / pull apart over time communities as well as individual faith. These criticisms work away within a brother or sister, disaffirming them as believers, disaffirming them for who they are, raising doubt and not hope, humiliating them that they haven't made the grade... until they are corrupted. We have a specific example of a man being punished in judgment for his words, and it may well be the basis for the Lord's teaching here: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done this..." (Is. 10:11,12). And there follows a long quotation of his words. These words were the 'fruit of his heart'-

out of the abundance of his heart his mouth had spoken. And these words were almost cited back to him at the time of his condemnation. We know, however, that it is quite possible for human actions and words to *not* reflect the heart. Consider how Sennacherib invaded Judah but in his heart "he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so" (Is. 10:7). This is why the Lord clearly condemns the thought as being as bad as the action, even if the action isn't actually committed. Ps. 55:21 laments how words cannot reflect the true state of a man's heart: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords". So why, then, is there so much emphasis on spoken words as the basis for judgment to come? Surely it is that although thoughts will also be judged, and the hypocrites revealed for who they are, it doesn't follow that a good man sometimes uses 'corrupt speech'. It's impossible. A good man cannot bring forth bad words. But a bad man can sometimes bring forth words which seem good on the surface, but which are in fact counterfeit. But it can't happen another way- a good man's words aren't just his surface level sin. And I for one flinch at this; because when I have to own up to having said inappropriate words, my flesh wants me to think that in my heart, I didn't mean them. And yet, ruthlessly, I must press the point: bad words reflect a bad heart. We can't justify them. We must repent of them, and by the influence of knowing God, through and in His Son and His word, we must change the state of mind that leads to them. And we should be, on one hand, simply *worried*: that bad words came out of a bad heart. And a good man cannot bring forth such corrupt fruit. There is with some especially the problem of temper, saying things well beyond what they really mean in hot blood. But here again, the words of hot blood do reflect something of the real man or woman. The tongue is a fire that can lead to condemnation, whatever and however we justify its' words as a relatively harmless outcome of our personality type. This may be true, but it isn't harmless.

6:45 *The good man*- The good man is as the good tree. His good fruit or works is because of a good mind within- and vice versa. The Lord as always took the issue to its deepest essence- which was within the deepest heart. He was the ultimate "good man" and good tree. His good works came forth from deep within Him, they were a reflection of His mind.

*Out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good*- The heart is our wealth. This is the real gold and silver, the core value of a man's life- what we are thinking about. Spiritual mindedness is the essence of Christianity.

*And the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil*- The Lord uses the same word to speak of "this evil (AV

"wicked") generation" in Mt. 12:45. The problem with Jewish society as a whole was how they thought. This is the Biblical emphasis- sin comes from our thinking, and not because society is controlled by a personal cosmic 'satan' figure.

*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks-* Gk. 'that which remains'. The idea may be that a certain amount of human thought is taken up with basic human functioning, but that which remains over and above that, the part of our thinking which we can consciously control, is what must be controlled- for it is that part of our thinking which controls the words and actions which are the fruit on the tree of a man's life.

6:46 *And why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do the things which I say?*- In Rom. 2:13, Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel. The contrast is between saying "Lord, Lord" in this life, and then in the future not entering into the Kingdom. The contrast is between merely *saying* and actually *doing*. The Lord repeats the idea in His mini parable of the two sons; the one who 'said' he would be obedient, and the other who 'did' the will of his father (Mt. 21:30,31). The acceptance of Christ as Lord means that we are as His servants and slaves; it is for us to 'do' His will and work. This fits with the context of the preceding verses- that if He is really our Lord, we will inevitably *do* His will, and that doing will be actual, practical and visible. It is the false prophets who merely say but don't *do*, just as they claim to be good trees but don't have good fruit.

As with many aspects of doctrine, it is often difficult for us to appreciate how radically revolutionary they were in the first century context; and in essence they should lose none of their radicalness with us. David Bosch observes: "Christians confessed Jesus as Lord of all lords- the most revolutionary political demonstration imaginable in the Roman Empire". Philip Yancey likewise: "As the church spread throughout the Roman empire, its followers took up the slogan "Christ is Lord", a direct affront to Roman authorities who required all citizens to take the oath 'Caesar [the state] is Lord'" (*The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 246). It hurt, it cost, to recognize Him as Lord. And so it should with us. Men and women died for this; and we likewise give our lives in response to that very same knowledge. There is a tendency, which the Lord Himself brought to our attention, of calling Him Lord but not doing what He says. To know Him as Lord in truth is axiomatically to be obedient to Him (Lk. 6:46). The attitude which we have to the Lord Jesus *now* will be the attitude we have to Him at the day of judgment (Mt. 7:23 cp. Lk. 6:46).

The sensation of working for the Lord can be so self-deceptive. He draws the difference between doing many wonderful works in His name, saying "Lord, Lord"; and *really* doing the will of the Father (Mt. 7:21,22). The parallel Lk. 6:46 has that men will say "Lord, Lord" but not really hear His words. To hear them is to do the will of the Father. Putting all this

together, it is perfectly possible to bear His Name, call Him Lord, work hard for Him- and yet never really hear His words, and thereby never really know the will of our Father. From this parallel we can conclude that our attitude to Christ in this life (e.g. "Lord, Lord!") will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. If we think He is a hard, unreasonable Lord: that is how He will be. To the froward (in this life), He will shew Himself froward. Straight away we are met head on with a major challenge: Our attitude to Christ in this life will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. John's letters reason down the same line: "If (in this life) our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence (now) toward God... this is the confidence that we have in him... abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence... before him (at the judgment) at His coming" (1 Jn. 3:21; 5:14; 2:28). The confidence we have towards Christ now will be the confidence we have at judgment day. This fact should pull us up out of the spiritual indifference which characterizes so much of our lives. If we see Christ as an abstract theological necessity, a black box in our brain called 'Christ'; if we don't have a dynamic, two- way relationship with Him now- then this too is how we will regard Him then.

In 1 Cor. 13:2 Paul understands those who say "Lord, Lord" as saying it without really *knowing* Christ, and living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this. Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The repetition of "Lord, Lord" shows that our attitude to Him in this life will be that we have when we meet in the last day.

6:47 *Everyone that comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you to whom he is like-* The parable of the builders is fundamentally about our attitude to the Lord. There is good reason to think it mainly concerns the attitude of the responsible; these words of Jesus are set against the background of :27: "I say unto you which hear". The rest of the chapter seems to be addressed primarily to the disciples- e.g. :41,42 speak of them beholding the mote in their brother's eye; warning surely more relevant to believing disciples than to the world generally. The parable of the builders likewise refers to those within the ecclesia, who know Christ as their Lord: "Lord, Lord", they say. Among this class of people there would be "many" (Mt. 7:21- 23) who would hear Christ's sayings, but not do them. See on Jn. 13:13. I'm obviously labouring this point, that the builders in the parable are those within the ecclesia, or at best the responsible. This is because the parallel record in Mt. 7 is rather unpleasant to apply to the ecclesia; it says that "many" of us will be in the category who say "Lord, Lord", and whose house will be

destroyed. The Greek for "many" can imply 'the majority'. Even the majority of those who hear Christ's words simply don't do them. Now that's an uncomfortable statistic for us who sit before the bread and wine each week, seeking to hear Christ's words and do them. This parable was spoken in the context of crowds of the ecclesia of Israel coming to Christ, hearing His words, and doing sweet nothing about it. Such an attitude is not building a house on a rock.

*Logos* suggests more than simply words. The Lord intends us to get to the essential intention of His Spirit. God's word is often styled His 'judgments' in the OT (e.g. Ps. 119:43,160; 147:19). In His word we see His judgments- how He judges and will judge. And in the wealth of Bible history we see examples of how these judgments have been articulated with men in practice. Thus the Lord Jesus concluded the sermon with a parable of judgment, that of the two builders. One heard the Lord's words of the sermon and did them, the other heard but didn't deeply apply them. The message was clear: 'Deeply meditate on what I've just been saying. For this is the basis upon which I will judge men in the last day. You can try to discern for yourselves how seriously and fundamentally you apply my words; and in this you will have a preview of how I will judge you'.

The figure of building a house on a rock conjures up the idea of sweating labour. Do we feel that we are spiritually sweating, in a sense? Is it that hard to understand and therefore do the words of Christ? A number of passages make this connection between labouring and understanding the word. Elders labour in the word (1 Tim. 5:17), as the prophets laboured in writing the word of God (Jn. 4:38); and the true Bible student is a labourer who will not be ashamed of his work at the end (2 Tim. 2:15). And the Lord Jesus spoke of us labouring for the manna of God's words, even harder than we labour for our daily bread, and more earnestly than the crowds ran around the lake of Galilee in the blazing midday sun in order to benefit from Christ's miracles (Jn. 6:27). One could be forgiven for thinking that most of us find hearing the words of Christ easy. But there is an element of difficulty, even unpleasantness for us, in truly understanding Him in practical application. How do we hear and do? We are helped to get the answer by considering how Christ elsewhere appealed to people to "Hear *and understand*" (Mt. 15:10). Truly understanding is related to action, 'doing'. In the parable, hearing and doing is like the hard work of digging the foundation on a rock. This is how hard it is to truly understand the words of Christ. Remember how the one talent man also dug into the earth (Mt. 25:18). He did some digging, he did some work. But he failed to truly understand. The very physical action of digging deceived him into thinking he had done enough, as the physical action of building deceived the man who built on earth. Of course we are progressing somewhere spiritually, as we live day by day. But our movement can deceive us.

James clearly alludes to the appeal to not only hear but do: "But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves" (James 1:22). James spells out the problem- we hear the Lord's words and for a moment assent to them- but don't continue to do them in the long term. "The word" is paralleled by James with "the perfect law of freedom". "But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). The term "perfect law of freedom" is hard to interpret, and it seems to be in contrast with how the New Testament elsewhere speaks of the Mosaic law as being a form of bondage, with Christ's teaching as the way to freedom. I would suggest that this "perfect law of freedom" refers to the Sermons on the Mount and plain (see on Mt. 7:1), perhaps specifically to the challenge to be perfect (Mt. 5:48); the Sermon, as we showed in commenting on Mt. 5:1, was the Lord's equivalent to the Mosaic Law. The Sermon would've been memorized and recited by the vast mass of early Christians who were illiterate. And James is urging them to not merely encounter the words and nod approvingly at them, nor even merely recite them- but continuing in actually doing them. And this of course is the challenge to us too, assailed as we are in our generation by too many words, to the point that we can easily give a passing 'like' to them, and yet live on uninfluenced.

6:48 *He is like*- Present tense. Matthew says he "shall be like"; the essence of judgment is now. We can discern the principles by which we shall be judged. The future tenses in Matthew's version imply that the truth of the parable of the builders will only be apparent at the day of judgment. The purpose of judgment day is largely for our benefit, and therefore the process will be public- we will learn from the rejection and acceptance of others. Paul alludes to the idea by saying that "the day [of judgment] shall declare" each man's building work (1 Cor. 3:13). And to whom will it be declared? The Lord already knows them that are His. It will be declared to the individual being judged, and to those who are observing. The Lord uses the same word translated 'likened' in speaking of how in this life, the state of the Kingdom in a man's life "*is likened*", present tense, right now, to various things (Mt. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2). But in Mt. 25:1 we find another future tense- at the Lord's return, the Kingdom *will be likened unto* the wise and foolish girls [cp. the wise and foolish builders]. We can perceive the essence of the Lord's future judgment in this life- for the Bible is full of His "judgments" ahead of time. Therefore the nature and outcome of the final judgment need not be a mystery for us, if we perceive the principles of judgment which the Lord teaches in the Sermon and elsewhere. But all the same, that day will be the final and ultimate declaration of those values.

*A man building a house, who dug and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock-* This is exactly what the Lord Himself is doing (Mt. 16:18; 26:61). There is a mutuality between the Lord and us. We build upon a rock, and He builds us upon a rock. We ourselves build, and yet we are "built up a spiritual house" by God (1 Pet. 2:5; note how Peter goes right on to speak of the Jews as foolish builders in 1 Pet. 2:7; he surely had the Lord's parable of the two types of builder in mind). Both men *built* in that both men *heard* the Lord's sayings. We are all making progress on our spiritual journey, for good or bad. There's no way to just take a break from the journey. We are building, hearing the Lord's will- but the question is, where is our foundation. The fundamental core, the dominant desire, of the Lord's people is Him. For the rock is clearly a symbol of the Lord Jesus ("that rock was Christ", 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:8 s.w.). On one hand, the Lord teaches that obedience to His sayings in practice is building upon a rock. And yet the rock is Him. He was the word made flesh, the perfect fulfilment and example of obedience to His sayings. To follow the Sermon fully means becoming as Him. And yet the judgment of the last day will not be a simple test of legalistic obedience. It will be a revelation of where our core foundation, our dominant desire, really is. Many people living in this postmodern, passionless world will have to think long and hard before answering the question: 'What is your dominant desire?'. Short term things such as getting a qualification, a career, a particular level or form of wealth, buying a particular house, marrying a particular person, some specific success for our children... all these things fade from dominance in the course of a person's life. Many people simply don't have a dominant desire. The difference with true believers is that we do- and it is 'Christ', Him as a person, the things of His eternal Kingdom. This perhaps more than anything else is the simple difference between the true believer and all other people. This is why there is a simple test as to whether a person is a genuine Christian or not- and it's 'fruit', as the Lord has just previously explained. The difference is clear. The dominant desire of a true Christian is manifest and cannot be hid.

Comparing with the parallel in Mt. 7 it seems that both men built on the same kind of ground- it was rock overlaid with sand. The difference was that the wise man dug through the sand to the rock, whereas the fool built only on the sand. To really get down to the rock of Christ is hard and long work. It is achieved through the process of 'doing' what He teaches. And the story is true to life- for so many of us in our spiritual biography can relate how we passed through years of being 'Christian' or religious without having any personal relationship with Jesus, not praying nor talking to Him, not sensing Him at all as a living Lord. The story suggests that there will be some, perhaps "many", who build a spiritual edifice of grand appearance which has no personal root in a relationship with Jesus- indeed, some actually preach against this because of their obsession with upholding theologies about the supremacy of God the Father. But getting

through the sand, through the dirt and dust of our own humanity, to truly knowing Christ- this is what alone will come through judgment day.

Paul uses the metaphor of building about the work of converting and building up others in Christ (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 10:23; Gal. 2:18), knowing that the day of judgment shall declare the quality of our work (1 Cor. 3:13). But even if that building work does not pass through the fire of judgment, we shall personally be saved (1 Cor. 3:15). But our personal house must stand firm throughout the judgment process. Note there is a continuity between the house before and after the storm of judgment day- it "fell not". Who we essentially are in spiritual terms is who we shall eternally be; our spirit shall be saved at that day (1 Cor. 5:5), our essential spiritual person will be preserved. The experience of the day of judgment will not make us somehow flip over another side and relationship with the Lord, previously unknown to us. Those who say "Lord, Lord" in this life without meaning will use the same empty terms in that day.

To get down to the rock, the man who truly heard Christ had to dig through the earth which the foolish man also dug into. Hearing Christ's words is likened to digging into that earth. Doing and understanding them is likened to then digging into the bed- rock. The foolish man did allow the word to go into him- skin deep. We need to ask ourselves how often these days the word really goes right through our skin, and forces us to hack into the bed- rock. Are we truly building our house on a rock? The force of Mk. 16:16, for example, went more than skin deep just before our baptism. We read it, thought about it, and did it. But now. Are we old and brave, thick skinned, hardened by the humdrum of repetition, no longer building a house on a rock? My sense is that many of us are. Let's be aware that Heb. 6:1,2 defines "the foundation" as "repentance", and an awareness of the reality of the resurrection and coming judgment. In some ways, the longer we are in Christ, the more likely it is that we will not reach down to the bedrock of these things as we ought to. I mean, how often these days do we really repent of something? How often does the reality of the judgment seat truly come home to us? The poetry of the Bible's language, especially if we read the same version, makes God's word glide over us. Exhortations, even the recollection of Golgotha's tragic scene, the final, friendless end... can all slip so easily over our heads. We rest on the laurels of past spiritual victories. Nothing really shakes us up, reaching right down to the bedrock. Surely each of us should be sensing a surge of spiritual urgency when we look at ourselves like this. Yet God will help us; it is He Himself who will "settle" us, or 'make a foundation for' us, as the Greek can mean (1 Pet. 5:10).

The rock which our response to the word must reach down to is that of the crucified Christ. That rock represents Christ and Him crucified,

according to Paul (1 Cor. 10:4 and 3:11 cp. 2:2). The Lord's parable of building on the rock was surely quarried from His understanding of Is. 28:16,17: "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone... a precious cornerstone. The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place". Truly doing God's word will always lead us back to the spirit of the suffering Christ on Calvary. If it does not, our building, our apparent development within the much-vaunted biblicism of our faith, is just a "refuge of lies". All our spiritual effort and suffering finds its ultimate summation in Christ's crucifixion. His suffering there is the quintessence of all spiritual struggle. It is quite possible that as we break bread weekly, we are merely digging a little deeper than usual in the earth, yet still not reaching down to the real meaning of building on the example of Christ's death. The wise man's house was "founded upon a rock". The same Greek word occurs in Col. 2:7, describing how we are "rooted and built up in him". The parallel Eph. 3:17 expands this to mean that if Christ dwells in our hearts, we are "rooted and grounded in love... able to comprehend... and to know the love of Christ", which was supremely shown in His death. Col. 1:23 associates this being "grounded and settled" with not being "moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard". If the word really sinks down deep within us, it will reveal to us the love of Christ on the cross, it will result in true love, and all this will be the outworking of the basic doctrines of the Truth which we understood at baptism. Thus the hacking away at the rock is not only hard, grim work against human nature. It reveals the wondrous love of Christ. The implication is that we can only really understand this love, that passes human knowledge, if we are really sweating away to obey Christ's words, to build our house on a rock.

Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience. He had an ambition to preach the gospel to Gentiles even when this was felt by the other brethren to be an outrageous thing to do. Thus Lk. 6:48; 11:33 speak of houses with cellars, which were uncommon in Palestine; and in Lk. 8:16; 11:33 of houses with an entrance passage from which the light shines out. The synagogue official of Mt. 5:25 becomes the "bailiff" in Lk. 12:58. In Palestine, the cultivation of mustard in garden beds was forbidden, whereas Lk. 13:19 speaks of mustard sown in a garden, which would have been understandable only to a Roman audience. It seems in these cases that inspiration caused Luke to dynamically translate the essence of the Lord's teaching into terms understandable to a non-Palestinian audience. Even in Mt. 5:25 we read of going to prison for non-payment of debts, which was not the standard Jewish practice. Imprisonment was unknown in Jewish law. The point of all this is to show that we must match our terms and language to our audience. See on Mk. 13:35.

*And when the flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it; because it had been founded upon a rock-* The allusion is

clearly to Noah's flood; although the Greek for 'flood' here usually refers to a river. Only those within the ark of Christ were saved. To do the will of God, to hear and do the Lord's teaching, to be in the ark of Christ, to be founded upon the rock of Christ as our dominant desire- these are all different ways of saying the same thing. Our core root, our foundation, our dominant desire, our main self-perception and self-understanding, must be of being and living in Christ. This is the fundamental divide between persons, not their statement of faith, their spiritual culture. It comes down to whether they have a heart for the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. And we cannot judge those "secrets of men" in this life, but we can at least be sure never to reject anyone who professes to have such a heart for the Lord. Paul uses the same word for "descended" to describe how Christ shall descend from Heaven at His return (1 Thess. 4:16); likewise the word for "came" is used about the coming of Christ (Mt. 24:30,39 parallel the coming of Noah's flood with the coming of Christ). The coming of Christ will be judgment; our meeting with Him will be the coming of the rain etc. Even the house founded upon the rock took a fair beating- the purpose of judgment day is to reveal to the builder (and other observers) how he built.

The flood which came was like the day of judgment. This fits in exactly with the way Christ used the figure of the flood to describe His second coming in Mt. 24. Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 3. The beating of the stream upon the house on a rock is a truly apposite figure for the day of judgment. It certainly implies a process of judgment, in which the unworthy will experience a gradual collapse of their spirituality. For the man with the firm foundation, the flood of the parable would have been a worrying experience. Would the house stand up to it? In many of the parables, we can profitably speculate as to likely details of the story. The wise man would have remembered his hard work on the foundation, not with any sense of pride or self-gratitude. But he would nevertheless have been aware of it. Our real spiritual effort will be so valuable in that day. Only then will we realize the extent of the fact that there can be no short cut to true spiritual development. A man cannot be crowned, unless he strive lawfully. The Lord's parable was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side. We are left to imagine the details of the parable. The foolish man would have run outside and watched his house being beaten down and washed away. He would have thought of trying to do something to stop the destruction, but then given up, realizing it was too late. The foolish girls saw that "our oil *is* running out" (Gk.). The unworthy will have that terrible sense of their opportunity and spirituality ebbing away from them.

The impression is given in the parable that the two houses were next door to each other; again confirming our feeling that this parable is about different attitudes to the word within the ecclesia.

"Come" is the same word in the model prayer- we pray for God's Kingdom to "come" (Mt. 6:10), but again we find it hard to pray that prayer if we understand it. We are praying for the storm of judgment to come and beat upon our house.

The picture of the storm beating on the house to see if it collapses implies a purpose and process of the judgment. If it were only a yes / no decision, the language of tribunal, judgment and appeal which occurs in passages concerning the judgment seat would appear to be out of place. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them (Mt. 25:44).

The same house stood before and after judgment. Every knee shall bow to Him in this manner- either in this life, or in condemnation before Him. This is what flesh must come to; and we must realize that now. We must fall down and be broken upon the rock of Christ now, or that rock will fall upon us and grind us to powder with the rest of the kingdoms of men (Mt. 21:41). Ananias and Saphira fell to the earth at their condemnation, whereas Saul fell to the earth in repentance (Acts 5:5,10; 9:4 s.w.). At the last day, we shall fall to the earth but be lifted up and made to stand (Rom. 14:4).

"Because it had been founded upon a rock" is surely alluded to by Paul when he teaches that we must be grounded / have a foundation in love (Eph. 3:17), in the Gospel of the Kingdom (Col. 1:23). And God Himself has the ability to "settle" or ground / foundation us (1 Pet. 5:10 s.w.)- if we so wish to have the things of the Lord Jesus, His love and His Kingdom, as the dominant, master passion of our lives, then God will confirm us in that.

*6:49 But he that hears and does not do is like a man that built a house upon the earth without a foundation, against which the stream broke- and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great-* The Jews who rejected the Lord Jesus are described as builders in Mk. 12:10; Lk. 11:48- and to unwise builders in Lk. 14:28.

he Lord spoke of the rejected at the judgment as being like a house against which "the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell". Floods (of the ungodly), winds (whirlwinds), smiting, a falling house- this is all language taken from Job's experiences. He went

through all this *now*, just as each righteous man must come to condemn himself in self-examination *now* so that he won't be condemned then. Flesh must be condemned, each man must come to know his own desperation. And if he won't do this, the judgment process at the last day will teach it him.

The collapse of time around the events of the judgment would explain this equation between the gathering and the judgment. The wicked will "immediately" feel that the house of their pseudo-spirituality has totally collapsed, as soon as the rain of judgment comes down (Lk. 6:49). The 'rain' will be a symbol of blessing for the righteous, and of judgment for the wicked. Likewise the cup of wine is another double symbol- of blessing, and of condemnation. Yet we know that there will be a *process* of condemnation- they will argue back with their Lord, expecting a reward for their good works... but underneath, "immediately" from their first knowledge of the Lord's return, there will be this sense of total collapse within them. The judgment passages which speak of the rejected apparently confidently demanding a place in the Kingdom in reward for their good works must be read with this fact as background.

The man who hears and does not appears to be building- he has the sensation of going some place in his spiritual life. He *did* dig a foundation- in sand, where it is easy to dig. But the Lord said that he built "without a foundation" (Lk. 6:49). Are we *really* hearing and doing- or just going through the motion of it, experiencing the sensation of appearing to do it? In the parable, the flood which came was like the day of judgment. This fits in exactly with the way Christ used the figure of the flood to describe His second coming in Mt. 24. Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 3. The beating of the stream upon the house on a rock is a truly apposite figure for the day of judgment. It certainly implies a process of judgment, in which the unworthy will experience a gradual collapse of their spirituality. For the man with the firm foundation, the flood of the parable would have been a worrying experience. Would the house stand up to it? In many of the parables, we can profitably speculate as to likely details of the story. The wise man would have remembered his hard work on the foundation, not with any sense of pride or self- gratitude. But he would nevertheless have been aware of it. Our real spiritual effort will be so valuable in that day. Only then will we realize the extent of the fact that there can be no short cut to true spiritual development. A man cannot be crowned, unless he strive lawfully. The Lord's parable was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side. We are left to imagine the details of the parable. The foolish man

would have run outside and watched his house being beaten down and washed away. He would have thought of trying to do something to stop the destruction, but then given up, realizing it was too late. The foolish girls saw that "our oil *is* running out" (Gk.). The unworthy will have that terrible sense of their opportunity and spirituality ebbing away from them. The impression is given in the parable that the two houses were next door to each other; again confirming our feeling that this parable is about different attitudes to the word within the ecclesia.

Condemnation will be tragic- the ruin is "great". Not only for those individuals, but for the Father and Son and all of us who view it. These are the final words of the Sermon. The Lord ends on the note of the possibility of condemnation, despite His many positive, upbeat and encouraging words about the certainty of salvation. The tragedy of the future we might miss is simply so great that the Lord felt He had to say this. It isn't mere negative psychology. The eternal reality of the issues before us are such that we can do nothing else but let the Lord's concern and earnestness ring in our ears.

## CHAPTER 7

*7:1 After he had ended all his sayings in the ears of the people, he entered into Capernaum-* The Lord was based in Capernaum and returned there after the public work of teaching the sermon on the plain and healing. The language of 'ending sayings' and the stress that the people heard what He said is somewhat solemn, as if the Sermon was a manifesto of the Kingdom which they had heard and were now responsible to.

*7:2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and at the point of death-* It is tempting to think that this is the same incident as recorded in Mt. 8:5-13. But the differences are such that they preclude this. In Matthew, the centurion and the Lord are in direct contact, and not through mediators and messengers. The healing is from a distance, a Gentile centurion is involved, his sick servant is healed, the Lord is willing to enter the Gentile's house but each Centurion says that this is not necessary as they believe in the Lord's power to heal. So there were two centurions in the Capernaum area who both had sick servants whom the Lord healed. The similarity of wording between the two is understandable; one of the incidents happened first, and the second Centurion was inspired to faith and humility by the words and attitude of the first one. This is how faith spreads today too; a person sees in practice the words and faith of a person similar in position to themselves- and they are encouraged to do as that person has done.

The next pericope in Luke concerns the widow's son at Nain, and this also is not recorded elsewhere apart from in Luke. Indeed, most of Luke 7 is material unique to Luke. This strengthens the suggestion that this is not the same centurion as in Mt. 8 but is more unique material.

*7:3 And when he heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, pleading with him to come and heal his servant-* It was common to approach another for favours through intermediaries whom it was thought would be impressive to the one being besought. The centurion clearly had faith in the Lord and yet failed to perceive the chasmic differences between Him and "the elders of the Jews"- the very class who rejected and crucified Him. So we can assume that the man's understanding of the Lord's message was minimal. And yet on the other hand, we must give due weight to his own later explanation as to why he sent the elders to the Lord- he says it was because he felt unworthy to talk directly with the Lord (:7). The man's faith progressed- from inviting the Lord into his house, to then realizing that such a visit was not necessary as the Lord had power to heal from a distance (:6). The qualities of humility and faith in this man are clearly set up as exemplary for all Gentile believers. For the aim of Luke's Gospel was to bring Gentiles to faith, and so this man becomes a parade example.

*7:4 And they, when they came to Jesus, pleaded earnestly, saying: He is worthy to have you do this for him-* The man protested that he was *not* worthy (:6), perhaps in conscious allusion to their words. The synagogue elders considered the man "worthy" by his works (:5), whereas the Lord saw him as "worthy" by his faith in the Lord's grace. The situation is set up as a cameo of the entire argument of Romans 1-8.

*7:5 For he loves our nation and he built our synagogue-* As noted on :4, they considered worthiness to come from generosity and loyalty to all things Jewish. But the point of the account is that it was his faith in the Lord Jesus, rather than these things, which was counted as significant. Theophilus, "lover of God", was the immediate audience for this Gospel; and his given name could suggest he too was a proselyte. Luke is perhaps trying to get him to identify with this centurion who likewise was a God lover, and whose example inspired the centurion in Mt. 8 to a similar faith. Luke was hoping that Theophilus would be likewise inspired. It was of course unusual for a Roman centurion to be a Jewish proselyte. The man must have taken issues of faith very seriously, and so his amazing faith in the Lord as Messiah is quite credible.

*7:6 And Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him: Lord, trouble not yourself. For I am not worthy that you should come under my roof-* See on Jn. 4:53. He was aware that Jews were not supposed to 'come to' or under the roof of a Gentile (Acts 10:28). He was therefore aware that the purpose of God at that time was for Jews rather than Gentiles- his understanding was quite deep. See on Mt. 8:9. But the Lord was quite willing to go under the roof a Gentile; that is the significance of the Lord's response that He would come to the sick servant. The man's faith and humility progressed; for the Lord was now near his house, and he may as well let Him enter. But he clearly felt unworthy to have the Lord in his home and even to directly talk with the Lord.

*7:7 Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to you. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed-* His faith was absolute- the servant would be surely healed at the Lord's word. The messengers sent to beg the Lord to assist were not therefore sent in order to as it were persuade the Lord to assist by their fine oratory and arguments. That is maybe how they perceived themselves, and how others perceived it; but the simple truth was that the man felt unworthy to even talk with the Lord. His faith in Him as Son of God was therefore so deep.

*7:8 For I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers; and I say to one: Go! And he goes. And to another: Come! And he comes. And to my servant: Do this. And he does it-* Like any good teacher, the Lord repeated His lessons. The disciples heard His commendation of the Centurion, who believed that just as he had men under his control, so Jesus had the whole cosmos under His control (Lk. 7:8-10); and they

learnt that lesson again as they sat awestruck in the boat soon afterwards: "What manner of man is this! For he commands even the winds and water, and they obey him" (Lk. 8:25). Clearly the centurion understood that the Lord was of immense power in His own right; He was surely appreciative that the Lord was God's Son, able to function for Him and with His power. He had thought through the issues. Perhaps He had heard the Lord's preaching in the Capernaum synagogue, which he had built. He felt a level of identification with the Lord; for he reasons that just as he has a servant whom he can command, so he wishes the Lord to treat *his* servant as *His* servant. He was inviting the Lord to take his own place as Lord and master of his family, and to have him as one of His soldiers, to come and go at His command, and to have his servant healed. The language of 'going' at the Lord's word of command is used elsewhere about casting out of demons. Maybe the centurion thought that the servant was demon possessed, and wanted the Lord to tell the demons to 'go'. In which case we can perceive that misunderstandings, even erroneous ones, having our science and language wrong, will not hinder relationship with the Lord if we have faith in Him.

*7:9 And when Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him-* He admired him [Gk.]. Here we see the humility of the Lord Jesus, that despite His own peerless perfection, He could admire the faith of a man who as a centurion was yet far from His own level of spirituality. Despite His peerless faith, the Lord Jesus marvelled at the extent of other's faith; the Gospels stress how sensitive He was to the faith of others (Mt. 9:2,22,29; 15:28; Mk. 5:34; 10:52; Lk. 7:9,50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). Yet measured by His standards, they probably hardly knew what faith was. "No, not in Israel" suggests the Lord thought that Israel's faith was something *very* high; when their rejection of Him was the cruellest tragedy in their history. The Lord marvelled at the man's faith, and also at the extent of unbelief in others (s.w. Mk. 6:6). Given the Lord's tiredness, mental and physical exhaustion, demanding program, extreme loneliness etc., the fact He had the emotional energy to marvel is an essay in His extreme sensitivity, and how He let neither His spiritual mission nor His external circumstances stop Him from having such sensitivity regarding the spiritual state of others. In this we see a deep challenge to ourselves.

*And turned and said to the crowd that followed him-* The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives.

*I say to you, I have not found so great a faith, not even in Israel-* The Lord was and is actively searching for faith in people. He is the man looking to find a great treasure (Mt. 13:44), seeking to find a pearl of great price (Mt. 13:46), finding a lost sheep or coin (Mt. 18:13; Lk. 15:4-9), finding weak and rejected workers to work for Him in His work (Mt. 20:6), wanting to find spiritual fruit on the fig tree (Mt. 21:19), finding willing guests for His own wedding (Mt. 22:10)- any who believe in Him. As He meets so many disappointments, imagine His joy at finding *our* faith, incomplete and at times misplaced as it is. Surely in all this work of seeking and finding just a few He was living out His own command to seek, because we will find (Lk. 11:10). He seems to allude to the idea in telling the disciples to fish on the right side of their boat, and they would find (Jn. 21:6). The incident is replete with symbolism- the message surely is that we will find converts for the Lord, if we seek for them as the Lord did. We in our turn are searching to find the Lord (Acts 17:27); and He is seeking to find us. Hence the flash moment when the searching God and His Son meet searching man in conversion to Christ. Ultimately we are 'found' at the Lord's return (Phil. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:7; 2 Pet. 3:14), but we are also 'found' by Him at the point of first faith in this life.

*7:10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant healed-* These 'sent ones' were converted; the apostles were intended to be challenged by the conversion of these other 'sent ones', just as we are intended to take lessons from the folks amongst whom we live in this world.

*7:11 And it came to pass soon afterwards, that he went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him-* Perhaps He had some other reason for going to Nain; or maybe He went there to attend the funeral because the woman and her son were relatives. The crowd would likely have been nagging Him all the way to perform healings. His economy of miracle is remarkable.

*7:12 Now when he came near to the gate of the city, there was carried out one that was dead, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and many people of the city were with her-* Luke's attention to women and the marginalized continues. This woman had no husband and now no son; she was without males in her life and thereby marginalized and despised. But the Lord comes to her, and becomes the ultimate saviour male in her life.

*7:13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her: Weep not-* We are given the impression that the Lord's plans of action were sometimes spontaneous. Realizing how she was now bereft of males in her life, He felt compassion for her and intervened. And yet if we enquire why He decided to take a journey to Nain, we conclude that it was specifically to attend this funeral and transform it. "Weep not" is itself

an invitation to faith in Him. Otherwise, it is a most inappropriate thing to say to a mother as she buries her son. She could only stop crying if she believed that the Lord could radically change the situation. And He could.

*7:14 And he came near and touched the coffin; and the bearers stood still. And he said: Young man, I say to you, arise-* The Lord spoke to the corpse of the widow's dead son as if it were already restored to life; see on Mk. 5:41. The touching of the coffin was all significant, for it made the Lord ritually unclean. And yet He touched it when in His own mind having proclaimed the man alive; there was therefore no defilement from a dead body because in fact the body was not dead. The Lord surely knew the kind of casuistic discussion of the legalism of the situation which would be provoked. And He was seeking to teach through the miracle that legalistic defilement is no issue to Him because He can transform defiling situations. He taught the same by touching lepers and sick people who were probably also ritually unclean. But He touched them at the point of healing, raising the legalistic question as to whether He had in fact touched the defiled, seeing that He spoke of dead and unclean things as if they had already come clean and alive to Him.

*7:15 And he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother-* The idea of giving the man over to his mother would again imply physical contact between the Lord and the once dead man; and surely the mother embraced her son. The new life given by the Lord meant that concepts of defilement were changed; and it was this fear of defilement which had stymied the development of true spirituality within Judaism, just as it does within legalistic Christianity today. "Sat up" is literally to be sat up, suggesting the Lord lifting up the revived man to a sitting position. The Greek is only used in one other place, again by Luke, when Peter raises Tabitha and she sits up (Acts 9:40). This continues Luke's theme that the Lord's work and style of operation was continued in the ministry of His body of believers. Their work, as ours, was as if He was still on earth, present through them on account of the presence of His Spirit in the Comforter. And their whole style of working was therefore reflective of His.

*7:16 And fear took hold of all, and they glorified God, saying: A great prophet has arisen among us, and God has visited His people!-* See on Mk. 1:2. Juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His exaltation is found all through Bible teaching about His death. He touched the coffin- so that the crowd would have gasped at how unclean Jesus was, and how He had identified Himself with the unclean to the point of Himself appearing unclean. It was surely shock that made the pallbearers stop in their tracks. But then the Lord raised the dead man- and the people perceived His greatness, convinced that in the person of Jesus "God has visited His people". His humanity and yet His greatness, His Divine side if you like, were artlessly juxtaposed together. Hence prophetic visions of the exalted

Jesus in Daniel call Him "the Son of man". But again we notice another juxtaposition- of fear along with glorifying God. Why should they be fearful that God had visited them in His Son? The same idea has been used in Lk. 1:68,78 of how 'God visiting' is parallel with 'God redeeming' from sin. Why fear redemption and salvation? The only reason for such fear would be because they sensed that this visitation from God required their repentance and exposed their sin. The Gentiles were "visited" (s.w.) in order to take out a people for His Name (Acts 15:14). The visitation of God in His Son required that people respond, and thereby become "His people". And this demanded too much for many in Israel.

*7:17 And this report about him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region-* The *logos* "went out"- similar language as used in John's gospel. It hardly refers to any personal pre-existence of the Lord. It seems that it was the spreading of this "report" which reached some of John's disciples (:18). The report in view could be of the resurrection in Nain, or that of :16- the idea that the Lord was indeed the promised Messiah or "prophet".

*7:18 And the disciples of John told him of all these things-* They heard the "report" that Jesus of Nazareth was "the prophet" (:16) and that the time of Messianic visitation had come. As noted on :19, the "report" may have been that the Lord was not so much Messiah as the Elijah prophet. This would make John's enquiry of :19 not so much a lack of faith but more of genuine confusion as to the Lord's prophetic identity.

*7:19 And John calling to himself two of his disciples, sent them to Jesus, asking: Are you he that comes, or look we for another?-* Even John the Baptist, whose teaching had prepared most of the twelve to accept Jesus, seems to have not been altogether clear about what we might consider fundamental things. He speaks of Jesus as "the one to come", a commonly understood description of the Elijah prophet, based on the phrase being used about him in Mal. 3:1- and not of Messiah Himself. Thus John the Baptist anticipated that this "one to come", his cousin Jesus, would be a refining fire (Mt. 3:12)- which is exactly Malachi's language about the Elijah prophet (Mal. 3:2; 4:1). This would explain why John the Baptist had apparent 'doubts' whilst in prison as to whether Jesus really was the Messiah. And it would also explain why the disciples expected Jesus to act like Elijah in Lk. 9:52-56. It was not until the baptism of Jesus that John the Baptist came to understand Jesus as the "one to come"; so the preparatory work which he had done with the disciples must have had what we would call a flimsy doctrinal basis. When Jesus called them to follow Him, and they so quickly obeyed, it is often assumed that John the Baptist had prepared them for this. But that preparation must at best have been very shallow and incomplete, given John's own admission that he did not recognize Jesus for who He was until His baptism. Why, however, was John's misunderstanding recorded

in the Gospel records? Or the misunderstanding of his father Zacharias, that John was in fact the promised Messiah, "the prophet", the one would bring forgiveness of sins and freedom from the Romans (Lk. 1:71-79)? Perhaps for the same reason as the language of demons is used, especially to describe the miracles at the beginning of the Lord's ministry. He didn't correct this. But over time it became evident that the sheer power of the Son of God meant that in practice, demons didn't exist. Likewise, as the ministry of Jesus unfolds to us in the Gospel records, it becomes apparent that He was Son of God, the Messiah- and not merely an Elijah prophet.

And yet for all this, it could simply be that John had a crisis of faith in prison. It can't be insignificant that John sends two disciples out just after the Lord had sent out *His* disciples two by two in Matthew 10. Surely this is a literary device to set up John in negative contrast to the Lord at this time; John sent out his pair of disciples in response to his crisis of faith. He knew Jesus was to do mighty works- but he had heard of them only by report. Those he sent out had already heard and seen the Lord's miracles (Mt. 11:4), and yet John sends them to Jesus to ask if He is Messiah. It all reads rather negatively about John. It could even be that he died at a low point in his faith, and yet the Lord's positive comment about Him surely suggests that He saw John as being ultimately saved. The records of the Kings of Israel and Judah, along with various passages in Ezekiel 18, place great emphasis upon how a man *finishes* his spiritual journey, and yet there are also Biblical examples of faithful men dying at low ebb spiritually; this will not necessarily exclude from the Kingdom, and John the Baptist may be another example.

*7:20 And when the men came to him, they said: John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask: Are you he that comes, or do we look for another?-* The emphasis may be on the word "you". The coming one was a well-known term for Messiah, based upon Ps. 118:26. Despite John's clearly stated belief that Jesus was the promised bridegroom, the lamb of God and Son of God (Jn. 1:29-34), it seems things had not gone according to the prophetic program John had imagined- and he now had doubts about Jesus. For a man claiming (at least implicitly) to be Messiah, it would've been an unnecessary question to ask Him 'Are you Messiah?'. It could be inferred that John still believed in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, but had begun to wonder if He was only the *herald* of "another" whom they should be looking for in order to establish the Kingdom. It could be that John's understanding of himself as the Elijah prophet had led him to expect that all Israel would repent, and then Messiah Himself would come and establish His Kingdom immediately. For this is indeed how the prophecies of Isaiah 40 and Malachi 4 could be read. Perhaps John was full of such self-doubt that he wondered if he really had been the Elijah prophet, and was thinking that maybe he had just heralded the Elijah prophet, Jesus, who was in turn to herald "He that should come". This is

the problem with holding a dogmatic view of prophetic sequences- when they prove wrong, either because our interpretation was faulty or because human lack of response means they are to come true in another way than ideally planned, then often peoples' faith in Christ Himself is damaged. If we have an open ended view of prophecy, whereby we understand it to state possibilities which may have other ways of fulfilment than what is ideally intended, then such crises don't arise. "Look we for another?" doesn't sound as if John was simply asking for a sign, in the spirit of Gideon. He had major questions about the whole prophetic program, sensing that something had changed; the word for "another" is also translated "altered" (Lk. 9:29). In this sense, his question may not necessarily reflect a crisis of faith in Jesus personally, but rather an earnest desire to know the new details of the revised prophetic program.

*7:21 In that hour he cured many of diseases and illnesses and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight-* Again we are being shown that the Lord's miracles were for a teaching purpose; in this case, to give a lesson to John's disciples and to John himself, proving beyond cavil that the Lord was Messiah, Son of God, and not simply a prophet. The Lord did heal from genuine feelings of compassion, as seen at Nain; and yet Luke seems to always stress that this was far from the only reason. Here His miracles were done in order to intentionally fulfilling prophecies in Isaiah, and then asking John to accept that (see on :22).

*7:22 And he answered and said to them: Go and tell John the things which you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up-* See on Mk. 6:3; Lk. 15:7. They had already told him once- the same word is used for how they initially had told John these things (:18). There is definitely the sense that John needed to work through the implications of what he was hearing, rather than having some specific explanation from the Lord. The request that John 'hear' these reports more carefully begs connection with the Lord's frequent comment that the Jews heard but did not really hear (e.g. Mt. 13:13-17). John's lack of understanding appears to be in some sense culpable and at best disappointing to the Lord. The Lord is seeking to assure John that if he just thinks about the evidence, it's clear that Jesus is indeed Messiah, and as John had earlier preached- Son and lamb of God, who saves His people from their sins. He seems to be saying that that was so wonderful and fundamental, that the rearrangement of the prophetic timetable is in a sense irrelevant compared to that. Whether or not the timing or chronology of events surrounding the Kingdom comes true as we expect, or whether or not we discern how God has re-planned the fulfilment of prophecy- is all irrelevant compared to the wonder of knowing Jesus as the Christ and personal Saviour.

The teaching of Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in the parallel record in Mt. 11:5,6. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life. But the Lord's positivity is a powerful example.

*The poor have the good news preached to them-* This was as remarkable and significant as the previous miraculous signs, of the blind seeing etc. There was a deep impression that religion was for the middle class or wealthy. Teachers didn't bother preaching to the poor because there was no possibility of financial support coming from them. Yet the Lord opened His manifesto in the Sermon on the Mount by saying that His message was especially intended for "the poor" (Mt. 5:3 s.w.). In many Christian circles, the same is true today. Churches need money (or, they think they do), and so their focus is not on taking the Gospel to the poor but rather to the potential tithers. The disciples were amazed that the rich wouldn't be saved (Mt. 19:24,25), so deeply ingrained was this idea that spirituality and wealth were somehow supposed to go together. The Lord was teaching the opposite. There's no doubt that the Gospel is designed for the poor; and that if one were to bring "the poor" *en masse* into many churches / ecclesias today, the existing membership would up and go somewhere else. The Spirit was clearly upon the Lord Jesus exactly *because* He preached the Gospel to the poor (Lk. 4:18). Our preaching attitude to "the poor" is a reflection of our spirituality. "The poor" in the immediate context were the disciples, for the Lord had just looked upon them in love and commented: "Blessed are you poor" (Lk. 6:20). In the response of "the poor" to Him, the Lord saw a Divine confirmation of His ministry. And it is the same with us. Our ministry is to take the Gospel to the unbelieving poor, and not to get middle class Christian religionists to shift churches and allegiance to our group. James 2:5 is clear that God chooses the poor *more than* the rich to be heirs of His Kingdom; so in this case, our preaching focus should be specifically towards them.

The same passage alluded to in Is. 61:1 promised freedom and good news to the imprisoned- which was where John was at the time,

according to Mt. 11. The Lord was encouraging him in a hidden kind of way that He was aware of where John was, and there would be ultimate freedom from that prison in the Kingdom.

*7:23 And blessed is he, whoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me-* Clearly the Lord saw John as likely to be about to stumble. As explained earlier, the cause of stumbling was [and is to this day] that the Lord at times makes changes in the outworking of His prophetic program. Because things haven't gone just as mere humans imagined it, because they can't get their heads around God's huge sensitivity to human repentance and choices, nor His subsequent willingness to change His timetable to accommodate that... therefore people stumble at Christ. The Lord encountered a similar situation in Nazareth, where people again were "offended in Him" (Mt. 13:57) because His Messiahship was not as they supposed it ought to be. Likewise the death of the Messiah by crucifixion caused even the disciples to be offended- it was simply not how they had imagined Messiah's salvation. They were "offended" exactly because He was 'smitten' (Mt. 26:31), even though the Lord had warned them ahead of time about His death so that they would not be offended (Jn. 16:1). The cross was therefore a rock of offence to many (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11). So often we see the process- people come to Jesus with preconceived notions of how things should be, and fit those notions into the structure of their 'Christianity'. But the Christ's most fundamental teachings may in fact outlaw their beloved notions and favourite suppositions. And because their imagination of Jesus doesn't fit in with who He actually is- they stumble. It's like falling in love with an idea of a person, rather than with the person as they actually are. God's word presents Jesus as He actually is, and it is this which we must accept, allowing it thereby to jettison all preconceived notions we have of Him. The parable of the sower taught that persecution leads to people being offended (Mt. 13:21), and John was certainly undergoing persecution for the word there in prison. But persecution leads to spiritual stumbling largely because of the dashed expectations- that with Christ, all shall go well for us, and we in this life shall be delivered from problems. But the Lord is stressing throughout His teaching that that Jewish conception of Messiah and Messiah's Kingship over men was simply incorrect. Those who followed Him would suffer and die, in one form or another, the death of the cross.

The Lord tried not to offend / stumble people (Mt. 17:27) and yet people were indeed offended in Him. But in Mt. 18:6-9 He makes offence of others a serious sin. In this connection of thought we see an example of where there are some things which can be said of Jesus, some things He could do, which we simply cannot do. In forgiving others, we are often challenged to forgive as the Lord does. Not all that He does can be replicated by us, nor indeed is it possible. Thus for us, forgiveness is

usually a process, whereas for the Father and Son it appears to be more instantaneous.

*7:24 And when the messengers of John had departed, he began to say to the crowds concerning John: What did you go out into the wilderness to see?*- The crowds whom the Lord was addressing were therefore eager listeners of John, even perhaps in a sense his disciples. We see here the fulfilment of John's commission- to prepare *in the wilderness* a smooth way for the coming of the Messianic King of glory. But the crowds didn't respond, and Messiah didn't come in His glorious Kingdom. I suggested on Mt. 10:11 that the mission of the disciples was initially to those who had responded to John the Baptist's teaching; and now whilst they were away on their preaching tour doing such follow up work, the Lord was doing the same, addressing a crowd who had also responded to John enough to trek out into the wilderness to hear him.

*A reed shaken with the wind?*- See on :41. The reference is probably to the reeds growing in the Jordan where John baptized. Just as the people didn't go there to look at the reeds but at John as God's prophet, so the Lord is hinting that they should not look on John's weakness but upon who he essentially was. When John the Baptist had this crisis of faith, the Lord spoke of John to the multitude as if he was a strong believer, no reed shaken in the wind of doubt. And yet He didn't just paper over John's doubts and forget them, pretending He hadn't seen. The message He returned to John encouraged him to look back to the Isaiah prophecies of Messiah, and to remember especially the way that the weak, doubting ones would be made strong. The Lord evidently sought to strengthen the weak John by this allusion. The language of being *shaken* by *wind* is used elsewhere by the Lord in describing the process of condemnation at the last day (both Greek words are found in Mt. 7:25,27). The Lord's idea may therefore be: 'Sure, John is wavering at this very moment. But when you saw him in the wilderness, he wasn't; and in God's eyes, even now, he's not shaking in the wind, he's not going to be condemned at the day of judgment- even though, as you've just heard, he has his doubts and weaknesses'. Perhaps the Lord had John in mind when He soon afterwards spoke of how He would not condemn even a broken reed (s.w.- Mt. 12:20), but rather still use it as a channel for the oil of the Spirit. The whole situation with John is helpful in coping with others who clearly are passing through times of trial which is resulting in their faith wavering. Think positively of who they were, have been, and still essentially are...

*7:25 But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft clothing? Look, they that are gorgeously apparelled and live delicately, are in kings' courts*- The allusion is surely to Herod and Herodias, who had imprisoned John. John's clothing was rugged, not soft (Mt. 3:4). The Lord is drawing a contrast between John and Herod who imprisoned him. Herod Antipas

had minted coins with a reed on them to celebrate the building of Tiberias. Perhaps the Lord is saying: 'OK, so John is weak for the moment, there in prison. But just think of the man he was when he was free, and how in God's eyes he compares so favourably against Herod who imprisoned him'. In His gracious way, the Lord is teaching that the overall sum of a man's spiritual life must be considered, and not whether he ends it with some element of weakness. This approach is also to be found in the way the inspired record appears to comment upon some of the kings of Israel and Judah- weakness at the end didn't necessarily scribble God's overall judgment of their lives.

*7:26 But what went you out to see?*- Three times in :7-9 the Lord reminds them of their trek out into the wilderness to hear John; His point is that the respect they once had for him should remain, despite his wavering under extreme suffering. God's overall impression of Job appears similar, and it is a good teaching for we who are all too inclined to too harshly judge a good believer for a temporary period of weakness. The Greek phrase 'go out to see...' is used in classical Greek about going out to a spectacle or show. The Lord is suggesting that perhaps that was all their interest in John might have been, just as today likewise, it's quite possible to visit the truest church and hear the truest teaching, yet unperceived by those who are merely 'going to church'.

*A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and much more than a prophet-* The idea is 'the greatest prophet'. Judaism had various theories about who had been the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. The Lord was saying that actually, the greatest of them was that man who was now sitting in the grim prison cell, having a crisis of faith and understanding.

*7:27 This is he-* The emphasis is on the word "is". He was the prophet who came to herald Messiah. And yet John had denied that he was Elijah, nor "that prophet" (Jn. 1:20), surely a reference to the Elijah prophet; even though he later stated that he had been 'sent before' Messiah (Jn. 3:28), and was the voice of the Isaiah 40 prophet crying in the wilderness (Jn. 1:23). The Lord is saying 'Actually, John was that prophet. He initially denied it in his humility, but he really was and is "that prophet". Now again his humility has led him to self-denial, he's wondering whether in fact I am the Elijah prophet and the Messiah Himself is yet to be 'looked for'. But take it on My authority- he really was the Elijah prophet, even though his humility leads him to self-doubt at times'.

*Of whom it is written: Look-* An invitation to perceive, and the Lord was asking them to perceive in that imprisoned man a great prophet, to see beyond his temporary, surface-level crisis of John, to perceive that "this is he".

*I send My messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way before you-* The pronouns are somewhat different from the original in Mal. 3:1:

"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before [My face] ... says Yahweh of Armies". Jesus, as the face and presence of God to men, interpreted the words of His Father as being spoken personally to Him. The way was prepared before God's face, according to Malachi, but God's Son applies that to Himself. That is not to say that Jesus was God in any Trinitarian sense. He was the supreme manifestation of God, and He quotes Malachi 3 in such a way as to teach that to those with ears to hear. We have a window here onto how the Lord Jesus read Scripture; passages about His Father were applied by Him to Himself, but that is no claim by Him to be God Himself in person.

The Lord is reminding the crowds who had gone out to hear John in the wilderness that *they* were the way which John had tried to prepare, and He was now the face of Yahweh standing before them. But they had become side-tracked from the essence of personal transformation by a worry about the credibility and humanity of the messenger; and again, this is a principle which badly needs our attention in our own path. So often believers leave the path, the way prepared, because of the perceived weakness or plain humanity of the one who taught them.

The Hebrew text being quoted in Mal. 3:1 has a word play here. "Prepare" translates *panah*, meaning to turn the face (s.w. Gen. 18:22 where the Angels "turned their faces"), and "Before [your face]" translates *paniyim*. The idea is that the messenger would turn the faces of people towards the face of God. The height of the calling was hard for Jewish minds, indeed for any human mind, to take on board; that the God whose face even Moses could not see can be seen face to face, thanks to the work of John the "messenger" turning men's faces to the face of Christ, who is the image of God. No wonder the people so easily became distracted from the height and wonder of the invitation, by focusing upon the fact that a depressed and humble prophet awaiting death in a dark prison cell had some crisis of Biblical interpretation. And so, so often the wonder of our calling likewise is eagerly forgotten by us and eclipsed by petty gossip and speculation about the faith and possible spiritual status of another man.

*7:28 I say to you, among those that are born of women- there is none greater than John-* The Lord Jesus was Himself the greatest of all born of women (Gal. 4:4), but in His humility He adds no rider to the effect 'John was the greatest of all born of women, Myself excepted, of course'. How we love Him for His humility.

*Yet he that is but little in the kingdom of God is greater than he-* The little ones were the disciples, according to what the Lord had recently said in Mt. 10:42 (s.w.). He was urging them, yet again, to see their exalted status and to get over Judaism's attitude that the prophets were icons to whom the rank and file of God's people should never pretend. The Lord is using hyperbole here to make the point- that His immature 'little ones'

were going to be far greater than even John, the greatest prophet. Or He could be implying that there will be some element of rank in God's future Kingdom- ruling over different numbers of cities, one star differing from another in glory. And the least in that age will be far greater than John was *in this life*. And yet Jesus was proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom in the sense of the breaking in of God's principles in the lives of men. He could mean that John was the greatest under the old system, but the least of those within the new system were greater than John. Oscar Cullmann made a case for translating *mikroteros* here as "the youngest", with reference to the Lord being younger than John the Baptist and yet greater than him (see Jn. 3:30).

*7:29 When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John-* "Acknowledge" is the word for "justify". They justified God, rather than justifying themselves as the impenitent Jewish leaders did (s.w. 16:15). God is justified by our recognition of sin (s.w. Rom. 3:4). Achan likewise was asked to give glory to God by repenting (Josh. 7:19), as are Israel (Jer. 13:16). And in mutual response, God justifies us through imputing righteousness to us in the process of forgiveness (Rom. 8:33). So this comment that they acknowledged God's justice, or justified God, is stating that they repented. They had already been baptized by John, but that baptism was unto repentance; see on Mt. 3:3,11. He baptized in order to lead to repentance, not to as it were set the seal upon a suitably cleaned up life. And in these cases, they did now repent as hoped for. But what was it which they heard which provoked this? Perhaps it was realizing that John their baptizer was also imperfect in faith and understanding, and yet was being comforted that despite his crisis of faith in prison, the Father loved and accepted him. And this inspired those he had baptized to repent further.

*7:30 But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized by him-* Some had been baptized by him, so the reference is to the Pharisees and lawyers in the crowd at that time. God will fulfil His purpose for us- if we align ourselves with it, and thus see in everything that happens in our lives *His* will being forwarded. We can choose to not align ourselves with His will. The Pharisees rejected the purpose of God against themselves by not being baptized by John (Lk. 7:30 ESV). His will is not that we should sit around doing Sudoku, watching movies, bantering on the internet, trying to get as much money as possible to finance our nice meals, expensive coffees and designer clothes. His will, as expressed in His very Name, is that He 'will be' grace, love, care, justice, salvation, righteousness, all over the world and to every man and woman. If these things are our focus, our mission, our purpose, our passion, our underlying heartthrob, if *His* will is behind *our* will... then everything somehow comes together for us in a dynamic and fulfilling existence, both in this world and in the life eternal.

7:31 *And the Lord said: Unto whom shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like?*- The Lord several times spoke of that entire generation as sinful and unresponsive to the Gospel. Yet the context here is talking of John the Baptist's work. This therefore was a tacit recognition that John's ministry had been unsuccessful in terms of converting all Israel, and therefore clearly there was to be a change in the prophetic program. As noted earlier in commentary on this chapter, it was this change in the prophetic program which was worrying John, even though unnecessarily in terms of his own salvation.

7:32 *They are like children that sit in the marketplace and call to each other, who say: We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep*- See on Mt. 21:32; Mk. 1:4. The Lord's enthusiasm for Israel's response to the Gospel comes out again when the grace of Jesus likens Himself to a street kid in the market who really wanted to get a game going with the other kids. He offered to play funerals with them (through His appeal through John the Baptist), but they refused. He then offered to play weddings (through His Gospel of grace, joy and peace), but still they refused (Lk. 7:32). By all means connect this with another market place parable, where Christ (the servant) comes there to try to recruit labourers, on almost unbelievably good rates.

John's ministry was like children wanting to play funerals, and taking the initiative by beginning with mock weeping- but not getting any response. The Lord's ministry was as children wanting to play weddings, piping to the other children, who would not respond by dancing. Note that in Mt. 10:42 the Lord has likened His preachers to little children. Children were considered non-persons in society, and yet the Lord uses children in this parable as representative of His preachers. We note that although He likened them to children, He had to sternly warn them that they still needed to be converted and become *as* children (Mt. 18:3). We see Him so often imputing status to His followers which they had not in reality attained. This is to help us appreciate how He can impute righteousness to we who are not righteous. The parable of preaching here pictures children appealing to children. The commonality between us and our audience is very attractive and persuasive. We are humans reaching out to humans, indeed, children to children; the children called out (cp. calling out the Gospel) to "their *fellows*".

The marketplace was the town square. The Lord uses the same word in the parable of Mt. 20:3, where the call of the Gospel comes to men who are standing idle in the market place (s.w.). The picture is perhaps of society getting on with its existence, but the weak labourers and the children being left to one side, excluded from standard adult social and economic life. And it is to these that the call of the Gospel comes, in the midst of human busyness.

The Old Testament as well as the New is written in such a way as to encourage memorization, although this is often masked by the translation. There are several devices commonly used to assist in this. Not least is alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding syllables. "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced (*orchee-sasthe*); we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented (*ekop-sasthe*)" (Mt. 11:17) could be dynamically rendered: 'We piped for you, and you never **stept**; we dirged for you, and you never **wept**'. We note that the Lord parallels the work of the children John's 'children' or disciples, and His. Although both of them were somewhat negative about each other, the Lord saw both groups of children as doing the same work, despite a different culture and even doctrinal emphasis. The division in the town square was between the children begging the others to respond, and the children of this world who didn't want to, in the midst of those who didn't even have ears to hear and were just getting on with their worldly business and never 'heard' the invitation from either group of children.

The Lord was speaking this whilst the disciples were away on their preaching tour. He could say that just as John's preparation of the way had not been responded to on the level of the whole "generation" or society, neither had His more upbeat and joyful invitation been accepted. Note that the call of the Gospel is a call to engage with the preacher, to dance in response to the tune piped. Community and fellowship are all part of response to the Gospel; it's not about delivering truths to an individual who then accepts them and has no further relationship with the preacher. This is why the father-son analogy is used for preaching and conversion later in the NT. There is the implication too that the initial preacher continues to call the tune, to direct the dancing of the convert, even after initial acceptance of the invitation.

*7:33 For John the Baptist came eating no bread nor drinking wine, and you say: He has a demon-* The Gospels give the impression that there was mass response to John's preaching, but according to the Lord's reasoning here, He felt that "this generation", society as a whole, had rejected John's message and slandered him as in league with demons. Exactly the same was said about the ministry of Jesus (Jn. 8:48 uses the same term about Jesus- "He has a demon"). Surface level interest in the message, even applauding it and making a great effort to go out into the desert to hear it preached, was and is not the same as responding in real repentance.

*7:34 The Son of Man comes eating and drinking, and you say: Behold a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!-* See on Mt. 11:19. The Lord was accused of being a drunkard, a glutton,

and a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:34). This is all language reminiscent of the commands for the parents to slay the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21:18-21. It's conceivable that one of the reasons why His death was demanded was because of this. Hence His relatives sought to take Him away out of public sight. It's also been claimed that the Jews' complaint that Jesus 'made Himself equal to the Father' (Jn. 5:18) is alluding to a rabbinic expression which speaks of the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21 as being a son who makes himself equal to his father. The shame of being Jesus' mother eventually wore off upon Mary, or so it seems to me. Just as the shame of standing up for Christian principles can wear us down, too. In passing, note that the prodigal son is likewise cast in the role of the 'rebellious son' who should be killed; the correspondence suggests that the Lord Jesus can identify with sinners like the prodigal because He was treated *as if* He were a sinner, a rebellious son; even though He was not in actuality.

The criticisms of the Lord here were all related to His drinking, eating and table company. Jesus showed by His fellowship with "the poor in spirit" that He meant what He said. He, as God's Son, extended His Father's fellowship to them in the here and now of this life. Luke seems to have been especially perceptive of the fact that Jesus often accepted invitations to eat with those whom others despised (Lk. 5:29; 7:36; 10:38; 11:37; 14:1). In 1st century Palestine, to eat with someone was a religious act. The host blessed and broke the bread and then broke off a piece for each guest, thus binding together all present. This was why the many sects of Judaism carefully limited their table fellowship (notably the Pharisees and Essenes). Thus it was the Lord's desire to share table fellowship with the very lowest (apparently) within the community of God that brought Him such criticism (Mt. 11:19; Mk. 2:16). His teaching also made it plain that He saw table fellowship with Him at a meal as a type of the future Messianic banquet, to be enjoyed in His Kingdom at His return, when redeemed sinners will again sit and eat with Him (Lk. 22:29,30). To accept the gift of the bread of life at the breaking of bread is to symbolize our acceptance of the life that is in Him. If we believe what we are doing at the memorial meeting, we are showing our acceptance of the fact that we will be there, and that what we are doing in our humble breakings of bread is in fact a true foretaste of the Kingdom experience which awaits us.

The Lord was 'fond' [*philos*] of sinners; He liked them and their company. In this we see His greatness, for most spiritual people admit to finding the company of the unspiritual somewhat of a burden. But the Lord's spirituality was beyond that. Truly He is the sinners' friend.

7:35 *But wisdom is justified of all her children-* This could simply mean that both His and John's disciples would be justified in the end, despite their differences.

Appreciating the inter-relation between 'doctrine' and practice will result in our seeing through the fallacy that because someone's deeds are good, therefore it doesn't matter too much about their doctrine. The spiritual fruit which God seeks is that which is brought forth by the seed of His word, the Gospel. To *really* understand the basic Gospel with one's heart is to bring forth fruit, to be converted. True wisdom is justified by the works she brings forth (Mt. 11:19). This is why true conversion involves understanding and perceiving, and not merely hearing doctrinal truth (Mt. 13:15). Yet the counter argument would be that there are people who know God's truth who behave poorly, and there are those who know little of it who act well. This is why the Lord speaks of "wisdom", not "truth"; for wisdom is God's truth applied in practice.

On another level, we see here the Lord's response to slander, both of Himself and John. Wisdom is justified of her children- in the end. The "children" are those of Himself and John, who have just featured in His parable of the preachers, His children, meeting lack of response in the town square. Even if there is lack of response to the invitation, the Lord was confident that both His 'children' (the "little ones" of Mt. 10:42) and John's would be the justification of the truth and wisdom which they were teaching. This is all a comfort to those undergoing slander. In the end, if we are on the side of wisdom, we shall be justified.

7:36 *And one of the Pharisees requested him to eat with him. And he entered into the Pharisee's house and sat down to the meal-* As noted on :34, to eat together and to enter into a house was a sign of religious acceptance. Perhaps it was done simply to try to catch the Lord out by the presence of the sinful woman. Or maybe the Pharisee had a genuine interest.

7:37 *And a woman who was in the city, a sinner, when she knew that he was dining in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment-* The three anointings of Luke 7, Matthew 26 and John 12 are similar but different. Here the scene is in Galilee; but it inspired Mary to do something similar in John 12 in Bethany, which in turn encouraged an anonymous woman in Matthew 26 to do the same kind of thing near Jerusalem. Self sacrifice and devotion are examples which spread. This is the reason for fellowship in practice- to be inspired and encouraged together by human examples of responses to the same Lord. "A sinner" with no reference to any change could suggest that she was right at that moment still working as a prostitute.

7:38 *And standing behind at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment-* The weeping was presumably

for her sins, so ashamed that she stood behind Him, not facing His face. She believed that He was the Christ, the anointed one. And that understanding was not cheap nor painless for her; it motivated her to anoint the anointed one, the Christ, with her most valuable possession. Our belief in the most basic principles of the Lord and truths about Him should require likewise.

*7:39 Now when the Pharisee that had invited him saw it, he spoke within himself, saying: This man, if he were a prophet, would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is that touches him, that she is a sinner-* We note that the thoughts of a man within himself as he sat in his lounge many centuries ago... are recorded for us to this day. God notices all thoughts. When the woman touched the Lord, people reasoned that Jesus wasn't Messiah because He appeared not to know that He was being touched by a sinner. Yet this incident prepared the Lord for the time when He would be smitten and demanded to prophesy who smote Him, if He was the Christ (Lk. 22:64). At that moment, perhaps He thought back to this incident, realizing it had been a living out of the spirit of the cross, and it prepared Him for the final agony.

The Lord's response to Simon was not self-justification, but rather an enquiry as to how much Simon loved the Lord in response to the forgiveness of *his* sins (Lk. 7:39-48). And when the Pharisees criticized the disciples for mixing with sinners, the Lord's response was to appeal to them *personally* to repent (Lk. 5:30-32). And He went further in justifying His disciples, by answering another criticism of them by the Jews with the comment that unless they changed, they would be like old bottles broken by His new wine. *They* personally had to change- and they needed to focus upon that rather than criticizing others for their possible guilt by association.

Knowing the Lord Jesus as a person will excite real passion and feeling in response. Our reactions to the tragedy of the way He was rejected, and is rejected and mocked to this day, will be like those of the woman who was a sinner whom Luke records in Lk. 7. The Lord was invited to the home of a Pharisee, who clearly had only invited Him to insult and mock Him. For the Pharisee hadn't kissed Him, nor arranged for His feet to be washed- things which simply *have* to be done to an invited guest. And so that woman becomes passionate. She feels anger and hurt for the insult and rejection made against Jesus. She does what Simon the Pharisee didn't do- kissing Him, washing His feet. Having no towel to dry His feet, she let down her hair to use as a towel- and a woman could be divorced for letting down her hair in front of men. She touches the Lord's body- something deeply despised, for the Greek and Hebrew idea of 'touching' has sexual overtones (Gen. 20:6; Prov. 6:29; 1 Cor. 7:1), the Greek word 'to touch' also meaning 'to light a fire'. The ointment she carried between

her breasts denoted her as a prostitute- but she breaks it open and pours it on the Lord in repentance. Her attitude was surely: 'Yeah I'm a whore, you all know that. And yes, you're all gonna misunderstand me and think I am just madly coming on at this Jesus. OK, misunderstand me as you will, I don't care, I truly love Him as my Saviour, and there, I'm pouring out my ointment, I'm through with this Broadway life, I'm repenting, in the abandon of freedom from sin I now feel, I'm giving myself wholly to Him and His cause, mock me, be shocked and disgusted in your middle-class way all you like, but this is for real'. And this, it seems to me, is the response of everyone who truly comes to the Lord Jesus as a person, and feels for Him as a real person whom we have met in a real, valid encounter. The Lord responded to that woman by doing something which may not seem a big deal to us, but which was radical in first century culture. He criticized strongly the hospitality of His host. This just wasn't done, and still isn't. He was angry- because despite the woman's sincerity, they still labelled her as a 'sinner' (Lk. 7:39). He rebuked Simon through the parable of the two debtors, who owed 500 pence and 50 pence. As that woman went away "in peace", with her Lord passionately behind her and on her side, defending her to the world, so we too walk away from our encounters with Him.

*7:40 And Jesus answering said to him: Simon, I have something to say to you. And he said: Teacher, speak-* Like David, the Lord Jesus saw through peoples' actions to the self-talk behind it. He observed the body language of the Pharisee, despising the repentant woman; Lk. 7:39 records that the man "said within himself... 'She is a sinner!'", but "*Jesus answering said to him...*" (Lk. 7:40). The Lord perceived the man's self-talk, and responded to it. For Him, the Pharisee's unspoken words were loud and clear, and Jesus acted as if He was in a conversation with the man. He correctly read the man's silent disapproval as actually saying something, and responded to it as if in conversation. Of course we could argue that the Lord was empowered by a flash of Holy Spirit illumination to be able to read the Pharisee's mind; but it seems to me altogether more likely that it was His own sensitivity, His own perception of the other's self-talk, that enabled Him to know what was being silently said within the man's mind.

The parables of Lk. 7 and 14 were told during a meal- perhaps many of the others were, too. The Lord would have been a brilliant conversationalist, drawing out unexpected challenges and lessons from what appeared to be everyday facts. The implications of the parables are not pleasant- they would have soured some of His table conversations if they were properly perceived. And likewise with us as we read them in this age; these stories are indeed profoundly disturbing if understood properly and allowed to take their effect upon us. Yet for all their challenge, the parables of Jesus reveal how deeply familiar He was with

human life in all its daily issues and complexities. He artlessly revealed how He had meditated deeply upon the issues involved in farming, the problem of weeds, how much poor men were paid for a day's work, the desperation of the beggar Lazarus, problems faced by builders when laying foundations... He was and is truly sensitive and understanding of the everyday issues of our lives, and yet draws out of them something deeply challenging and radical. In this was and is His surpassing, magnetic brilliance. But the unanswered questions in the parables aren't all there is to them.

*7:41 A certain lender had two debtors. The one owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty-* The Lord saw the hypocritical Pharisee Simon as being a man forgiven fifty pence, who therefore loved Him (Lk. 7:41). This shows the generous way in which the Lord reads people. In the same chapter, the Lord recognised that John the Baptist had suffered a crisis of faith. But He tells the crowd that John wasn't a reed shaken with the wind, an unstable believer (Lk. 7:24 cp. Is. 7:2), but the greatest of God's servants; He overlooked the temporary failure, and judged the overall spirit of John.

*7:42 When they had nothing with which to pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most?-* See on :47. The forgiveness was granted *when* they had nothing to pay. Spiritually, having nothing to pay means a person is at rock bottom. They recognize that they cannot pay back, cannot turn the clock back, cannot make things right again. All they can do is to throw themselves upon God's grace. This is the idea of :29. The desperate sinners justified God in repentance. We wonder if this prostitute was one of the group mentioned there.

*7:43 Simon answered and said: He, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most. And he said to him: You have rightly judged-* There is a direct connection between amount of forgiveness and love for the Lord. And yet volume of forgiveness is also a matter of perception. Those who perceive the enormous extent of their sins and receipt of forgiveness are those who will love the Lord more. The woman's utter abandon towards the Lord was therefore because of this. Simon's minimalistic approach to the Lord was because he had little sense of personal debt to the Lord. The Lord's implication to Simon that he ought to have been more generous in entertaining the Lord is therefore another way of saying that he needed to repent the more and perceive the size of his debt.

*7:44 And turning to the woman, he said to Simon: Saw you this woman? I entered into your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wetted my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair-* It was rude to speak to a man without looking at them, let alone with back turned to the person and looking at a woman. The Lord is purposefully snubbing

Simon and demonstrating the huge respect He had for this prostitute. The Lord saw Simon the proud Pharisee as having been forgiven a little, and as loving Him a little (Lk. 7:44-48). This isn't how we would have seen that man. This is surely something more than generosity of spirit, even though the Lord certainly had this. His attitude reflects a hopefulness for Simon, an earnest desire for his salvation that only saw and imagined the best.

*7:45 You gave me no kiss, but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet-* The Lord saw a connection between the way the sinful woman kissed Him much, and the way she "loved much" (Lk. 7:45,47 RVmg.). He then told a parable about her and Simon the Pharisee. His point was that they both owed Him money and He had forgiven the debt, but He was looking for an appropriate response from them. Yet there is no evidence that Simon had repented before receiving that forgiveness.

*7:46 My head with oil you did not anoint, but she has anointed my feet with ointment-* The Lord makes a clear allusion to Ps. 23 in saying that *she* had anointed His head with oil, and His feet with ointment. There, it is *God* who is said to have anointed David's head, and prepared a feast in the presence of his enemies (Ps. 23:5). The historical background for this Psalm is when David fled from Absalom, and God manifested in Barzillai prepared an unexpected feast for him, just the other side of the valley from where his enemies were. Perhaps Barzillai also anointed David's head with oil at the time. It seems the Lord saw God as now manifest in a woman- He, through her, anointed His head with oil. And she did it at a time when the Lord was sitting at a great feast. It could logically follow that it was likewise she who had prepared the feast for Him, explaining her presence in the home. And if, as we have suggested, Simon the Pharisee was her brother or father or relative, then this would make sense. The whole thing surely has the ring of truth about it. Thus the Lord saw God as personally manifested through a sex worker. This should quieten all our doubts as to whether God really could be manifested through such as us.

*7:47 Therefore I say to you, that her sins, which are many, are forgiven (for she loved much). But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little-* Paul seems to have seen this woman as one of his patterns when he speaks of how he laboured more abundantly than anyone, because of the depth of grace he had known (1 Tim. 1:14,15)- for she "loved much" because she had been forgiven much (Lk. 7:47). In passing, was the Lord's comment "she loved much" an indication that He thereby knew how much she had sinned, without having the knowledge beamed into

Him, because He observed how much she now loved Him? In the parable which the Lord told comparing Simon and the woman, He made the comment that it was only "When they [realized that] they had nothing wherewith to pay" (Lk. 7:42 RV) that they were forgiven. He perceived how Mary had come to that point, at His feet, weeping, of knowing that she had nothing to pay. And Paul, and us, must reach that point if we are to find the motivation to "love much" in response.

He who is forgiven much, the same will love much (Lk. 7:41-50). The purpose of the Lord's mini-parable was not that the druggies, the hookers, the murderers will love Christ more than you or me. It was to teach that according to a man's *perception* of his sin, so he will love his Lord. All too often we serve Him because we have a conscience that we should do so; and yet the service He requires is service, even the senseless service of that forgiven woman with her precious ointment, simply because we *love* Him. And that overwhelming, overflowing *love* will only come from a true sense of our desperation. By knowing our desperation, we will know the Lord, we will know the grace and fathomless mercy which is so essentially *Him*: "Ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you... not according to your wicked ways" (Ez. 20:43,44).

7:48 *And he said to her: Your sins are forgiven-* This was not so much a pronouncement of forgiveness in response to repentance; rather is it a reminder to her that her sins really had been forgiven, an encouragement to her to believe that which was already true.

7:49 *And they that sat at food with him began to say within themselves: Who is this that even forgives sins?-* They *began* to say within themselves. But, presumably, they didn't verbalize it, when they easily could have done. Why not? Was it not that the anointing was an unspoken testimony that indeed, Jesus had forgiven her sins?

7:50 *And he said to the woman: Your faith has saved you. Go into peace-* Her faith is specifically her faith in forgiveness (:48) and the "peace" in view is therefore peace with God. This is what comes from faith (Rom. 5:1 s.w.). The woman therefore becomes representative of every believer.

## CHAPTER 8

8:1 *And it came to pass soon afterwards, that he went about through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good tidings of the kingdom of God; and companying with him were the twelve-* The Synoptic Gospels use the same words for the activities of both the Lord Jesus and the disciples in respect of preaching, teaching, healing etc. Theirs was a shared ministry. Thus the Lord is recorded as "*showing* the glad tidings of the Kingdom", but in the same context He asks a new convert to go home "*and shew* how great things God has done" (:39), as if he were to continue the 'showing' of Jesus.

The Lord taught them how to preach by having them accompany Him as He went about preaching. We can too easily assume that the purpose of the Bible, or the teaching of Jesus, the doctrine of Christ, is merely and solely to impart information. We can underestimate the degree to which the immediate intention of doctrine, of Jesus, was the transformation of human life. Many of us have been educated in an environment where the aim of teaching is to bring people to know things that have no practical effect upon their lives; yet this is most decidedly not how we should approach the words of the Gospel. Our model of learning has been 'from jug to mug', i.e. there is the assumption that the teacher simply pours out their knowledge into the student's passive mental space. And then the student is tested as to the degree of retention of that knowledge. But as disciples, students, of the Lord Jesus, we are about something different. If the Lord were scheduled to give a class in one of our ecclesial halls, my sense is we would turn up with our video cameras, tape recorders, note books, pens and pencils. But when in reality He delivered the 'sermon on the mount', His listeners simply beheld a life lived, the reflection of His words in practice, "the word made flesh". He both preached *and* shewed the Gospel- in His life as well as His doctrinal teaching. And so it should be with our teaching of others.

8:2 *And certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary that was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out-* Mary Magdalene was perhaps named after the town of Magdala. But named Magdalene may mean the Lord gave her that Name just as He gave names to His other disciples. The name derives from the Hebrew *migdol*, 'tower'. So the repeated description of her as the Magdalene could be implying: Mary the tower- Magdalene. Just as the shaky Simon was described as 'the rock', Simon-the-rock, so the shady Mary was surnamed 'Mary-the-tower'. It was common for Jewish rabbis to give their followers names, and it seems the Lord did this too- but the names He gave reflected the potential which He saw in His men and women. And the name He gives us likewise is a reflection of the potential we can live up to.

Mary Magdalene is the most frequently named person in the passion narratives. Clearly the Gospel writers, under inspiration, perceived her as the central figure amongst those who were witnesses of it all. In doing so they turned on its head the prevailing idea that the witness of a woman was worthless. They saw her as the main witness. The Gospel writers clearly see Mary Magdalene as of prime importance amongst the women who followed the Lord. Luke twice places her first in his lists of the ministering women (Lk. 8:2; 24:10). Matthew likewise focuses on how she was at Calvary, at the burial and at the empty tomb (Mt. 27:56, 61; 28:1,9). She clearly captured the attention of the gospel writers.

8:3 *And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who ministered to them out of their means-* It is worth noting, though, that the NT does reflect the fact that a number of wealthy individuals came to the Truth too; and that these were bound together in fellowship with the poor. There were wealthy women amongst the earliest followers of Jesus; and James and John came from a family who owned their own fishing boat and could employ servants (Mk. 1:19,20). Zacchaeus was wealthy- and note that he wasn't commanded to divest himself of all that wealth (Lk. 19:1-10). Consider the Philippi ecclesia- the wealthy lady from Lydia, the homeless slave girl, the middle class, respectable jailer, and the slaves of his and Lydia's household. There was nowhere else in the ancient world that all these classes could come together in such unity. Paul himself was not poor- "to be a citizen of Tarsus one had to pass the means test of owning property worth at least 500 drachmae". He was thought wealthy enough to be able to give a bribe (Acts 24:26). He assured Philemon that he personally would meet any debts arising from the situation with Onesimus. Consider the other wealthy converts: the Proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:12), Lydia, Jason who was wealthy enough to put down security for Paul, assisted by prominent women (Acts 17:4,9), Greek women of high standing at Berea (Acts 17:12), Dionysius and Damaris in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), Crispus the ruler of the Corinth synagogue (Acts 18:8 cp. 1 Cor. 1:14), Erastus the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23). Marta Sordi quotes evidence for there being Christians amongst the Roman aristocracy even during the first half of the first century. These few wealthy converts would have bonded together with the mass of poor and slaves who had also come to Christ. It was a unique unity.

8:4 *And when a great crowd came together, and they of every city had come to him, he spoke by a parable-* "Came / gathered together" is the Greek *sunago* from whence 'synagogue'. The idea is that there in the open air, on the sea shore, and *not* in a building, was the synagogue- with the Lord as rabbi, sitting in a fishing boat to teach whilst the audience *stood* instead of sitting (as they did in a Jewish synagogue, James 2:2,3). The whole scene is a radical inversion of orthodox Jewish

values and culture. The true synagogue was now in the open air, and beyond the imagination, frames and culture of orthodox religion.

The Gospel records give more information about the day on which the Lord told the sower parable than concerning almost any other in His ministry, with the exception of the crucifixion (compare Mt. 12:22-13:23; Lk. 11:27; Mk. 4:10). Various types of people heard His words; the immediate context is that great crowds were gathered to Him. The parable of the differing types of ground which were for the most part unresponsive to the seed therefore refer to the various reception given to the Lord's sowing when He first "went forth to sow" in His ministry.

The unusually large crowd were attracted to the Lord for various reasons, not least the hope of miracles. And He now tells them a parable to the effect that out of all those who encounter His word, only a minority would truly respond. Perhaps this parable is recorded out of all His teachings, because time proved it so true to that mass of humanity who heard Him preaching.

8:5 *The sower went to sow his seed*- The Lord's teaching in Mt. 12:43 that the Jews had not responded to John the Baptist lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Who is the sower? The preacher, or the Lord Jesus? Some Greek texts read "a sower" (followed by the AV), others "the sower" (cp. the Diaglott). Perhaps the Lord said both: 'A sower, the sower, went out...'. Surely the sower is the Lord Jesus, but in *our* work of witness we are *His* witnesses. For we represent Him to the world. This is why "the Spirit (the Lord the Spirit, Jesus) and the bride (the ecclesia) say, Come"; ours is a united witness with Him.

"Went" is the word used several times of the Lord 'going forth' to teach, and four times He uses it about His 'going forth' to hire workers for His harvest (Mt. 20:1,3,5,6). The 'sowing' of the word was therefore not merely a placing of ideas and theology in the minds of men, but in practice it was (and is) a call to go out and work, to harvest others for the Kingdom. The Lord 'came forth' in order to preach (Mk. 1:38 s.w. "... that I may preach there... for *therefore came I forth*"). Note that He didn't 'come forth' from Heaven as a pre-existent person; rather Matthew begins his Gospel by using the word about how the Lord 'came forth' from Bethlehem, His birthplace (Mt. 2:6). John's Gospel records the Lord as saying that He 'came forth' from God (Jn. 16:28 etc.), but this was in a spiritual sense; this is John's spiritual equivalent of Matthew's statement that He came forth from Bethlehem.

*And as he sowed*- The condemned man in the parable of Mt. 25:24-26 complained that the Lord expected to reap where He had not sown. But

the parable of the sower makes it clear that the Lord sows, even fanatically, everywhere. We perhaps would've reminded the man of the Lord's parable and His unceasing work of sowing, and reasoned 'That's not true!'. But this isn't the Lord's style. He takes people where they are and uses their own words and reasonings as if they are true- and shows by an altogether higher level of reasoning that they are not true. This explains His approach to the issue of demons. Matthew doesn't record that the Lord made a big issue about the seed- Luke's account records this: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed..." (Lk. 8:5). This appears to state the obvious- a sower sows seed. But "his seed" can also mean 'the seed of Him'. There is an obvious connection with the great Messianic promises to the Jewish fathers about their "seed". The seed is God's word, but it is also effectively 'Jesus'. For He personally is the essence of the Gospel message. This parable of the types of ground is explaining to the disciples why the majority of Israel were failing to accept Him, and thus had rejected the ministry and message of John.

*Some fell by the way side, and it was trodden under foot, and the birds of the air devoured it-* The reason for the way side growth being so short lived was that the seed was "trodden down". This is a Biblical idiom for disdain and contempt (Jud. 5:21; Is. 14:19; 18:7; 28:3; Dan. 8:13; Mic. 7:10). A half-hearted response to the word, is effectively to tread it down in contempt. Yet such is the word's power that even a partial response to it results in some growth- although in the final analysis, even this is unacceptable.

Our witness must fundamentally be Christ-centred. The same Greek words are used about treading underfoot the seed of the Gospel, and treading underfoot the Son of God (Lk. 8:5; Heb. 10:29). Our knowledge of Him and living in Him are the essence of our witness. He is essentially our witness.

The fowls taking away the unfruitful plant is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn.15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry, fruitfulness due to the word and purging recur. In Jn. 15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false teaching (e.g. the Judaist "birds" of the first century) is allowed by God. Thus Lk. 8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven".

The Greek *hodos* means simply 'the way'. It is the very word used about John the Baptist seeking to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus (Mt. 3:3). If Israel had responded as envisaged in the Isaiah 40 passage which speaks of this, then the way or road would have been prepared and the glory of Yahweh would have travelled over it to establish God's visible Kingdom in Jerusalem. On one hand, the fact the sower sowed even on

the 'way' is an element of unreality in the parable which simply points to the extreme enthusiasm of this sower, casting the seed onto all types of human personality, including those who appear hopeless cases. The seed of God's word would have made the rough way smooth for the King of glory to ride over to Zion. But instead the seed was despised and even condemned, trampled underfoot- an idiom meaning it was despised and even condemned. And then the birds came and took it away altogether. The way was not prepared by response to the seed because of the Jewish leadership stopping others responding. We note the usage of the same word to describe how some despised individuals sitting in 'the way' were in fact persuaded to respond to the Kingdom invitation (Mt. 22:9,10); Bartimaeus was likewise sitting in the way [s.w.] and responded, following Jesus "in the way" (Mk. 10:46,52). The 'way [side]' could have responded to the seed- but it didn't. Because men came and trampled it under foot, and the birds came and took it away. It wasn't as if there was no chance at all that it could have responded.

First of all, the seed was "trodden down" before the birds came. The impression is given of something, someone or a group of people hindering the growth of the seed- and that is a theme explaining the failure of the seed to grow in the other cases of 'bad ground'. The Lord has in mind the damage done to the growth of the word in the hearts of first century Israel by a group of people- and those people were the Jewish religious leaders. On a wider level, it's true that in practice it is the attitudes and pressures from others, conscious and unconscious, which stops people today from responding to God's word beyond an initial interest. Birds were symbolically understood in Judaism as the Gentiles- and the Lord is applying the symbol to the very religious leaders of Judaism, whom He saw as Gentiles in that they were consciously trying to stop people responding to the seed of God's word of Christ. And yet His later parable in the same chapter speaks of the birds coming and dwelling in the branches of His Kingdom (Mt. 13:32). I see in this His hope, even His fantasy, that His worst opponents would come into His Kingdom. And some did- for some Pharisees did later repent and were baptized, even Saul. And this is a great example to us, of wishing the very best, the Kingdom, for even the worst.

The picture of fowls coming down to take away the seed is firmly rooted in a host of Old Testament passages which speak of fowls descending on apostate Israel (Is. 18:6; Jer. 7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20). These birds taking away the seed are interpreted as "the wicked one" (the Biblical devil) 'catching away' the word. There must be a thought connection here with Jesus' comment that from him who would not understand the sower parable "shall be *taken away* even that he hath" (Mt. 13:12). Those who would not make the mental effort to grapple with Christ's parable had what understanding they did have snatched away by

the Jewish devil. "The wicked one" responsible for this easily connects with "the devil" of the parable of the tares which follows; this parable has frequently been interpreted with reference to Jewish false teachers of the first century. "The wicked one... catches away" the seed/word, as the Jewish wolf "catches" the sheep (Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). This association of the first century Jewish system with the wolf/ wild beast/ devil/ wicked one is probably continued by some of the beasts of Revelation having a similar Jewish application in the first century.

Lk. 8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven". The fowls taking away the unfruitful seed is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn. 15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry and fruitfulness due to the word recur. In Jn. 15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false teaching (e.g. the Judaist "fowls" of the first century) is allowed by God. The parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither do you suffer them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).

The seed was "devoured"; the same word is used of how the Pharisees "devour[ed] widows houses" (Mt. 23:14) and of how the Judaist fifth column within the fledgling church 'devoured' some (Gal. 5:15). The sober fact is that we can be barriers to the response of others to the word of Jesus, the word which is *the* seed- Jesus. One lesson we can take from the parable is that spiritual growth involves resisting other influences in order to respond to the Lord Jesus personally through His word.

8:6 *And other fell on the rock-* The Greek *petrodes* is a form of *petra*. The Lord had taught that the wise man who heard and did His sayings developed his spiritual house upon a *petra*, a rock (Mt. 7:24). And of course Peter was the *petra* upon which the church would be built (Mt. 16:18). So again we see that it was not impossible for the seed on the rock to prosper. The problem was that some who began their growth upon rocks stopped growing because of persecution and tribulation- which in the first instance was from the Jews.

*And as soon as it grew-* Matthew- "immediately it grew". There is nothing wrong with this, indeed this is as response to the word should be; and the Gospels often note the immediacy of response. When you perceive an opportunity to do the Lord's service, *respond immediately*. See it as another opportunity for "redeeming the time". This is a major Biblical

theme. Israel were not to delay in offering their firstfruits to God (Ex. 22:29), lest their intentions weren't translated into practice. The disciples *immediately* left the ship, simply put their nets down and followed (Mt. 4:20,22); Matthew left his opened books and queue of clients in the tax office and walked out never to return (Lk. 5:17,18 implies). There is a marked theme in the NT of men and women hearing the Gospel and *immediately* responding by accepting baptism. In this spirit Cornelius immediately sent for Peter (Acts 10:33), and the Philippian jailer was immediately baptized, even though there were many other things to think about that night (Acts 16:33). Joseph was twice told in dreams to "arise" and take the child Jesus to another country. Both times he "arose" in the morning and just did it, leaving all he had, responding immediately (Mt. 2:13,14,20,21). Paul and Luke immediately went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the inviting vision (Acts 16:10); Paul "straightway" preached Christ after receiving his vision of preaching commission (Acts 9:20). Indeed, the records of the Lord's ministry are shot through (in Mark especially) with words like "immediately", "straightway", "forthwith", "as soon as...". He was a man of immediate response, Yahweh's servant *par excellence*. He dismissed the man who would fain follow Him after he had buried his father, i.e. who wanted to wait some years until his father's death and then set out in earnest on the Christian life. The Lord's point was that we must immediately respond to the call to live and preach Him, with none of the delay and hesitancy to total commitment which masquerades as careful planning. Note how the Lord told another parable in which He characterized those not worthy of Him as those who thought they had valid reason to delay their response to the call (Lk. 14:16-20). They didn't turn Him down, they just thought He would understand if they delayed. But He is a demanding Lord, in some ways. What He seeks is an immediacy of response. If we have this in the daily calls to service in this life, we will likewise respond immediately to the knowledge that 'He's back' (Lk. 12:36, cp. the wise virgins going immediately, whilst the others delayed). And whether we respond immediately or not will be the litmus test as to whether our life's spirituality was worth anything or not. All this is not to say that we should rush off in hot-headed enthusiasm, crushing the work and systematic efforts of other brethren and committees under foot. But when we see the need, when we catch the vision of service, let's not hesitate in our response, dilly dallying until we are left with simply a host of good intentions swimming around in our brain cells. Instead, let's appreciate that one aspect of the seed in good soil was that there was an *immediacy of response* to the word, a joyful and speedy 'springing up' in response (Mk. 4:5).

*It withered away, because it had no moisture-* Because it had no depth (Mt. 13:6). John perhaps explains the 'depth' in his account of the woman at the well. The salvation in Christ was brought from the 'deep' [s.w.] well (Jn. 4:11). This connects the ideas of depth and moisture. These people

had only a surface level interest and did not really grasp the deep reality of the Lord and His work; just as some can apparently respond to the Bible, and yet not really engage in relationship with the Lord Jesus.

The same word for "withered" is used by the Lord about how Israel were the fig tree who had once had promise of fruit (in their initial response to John) but was now withered (Mt. 21:19,20). Those who initially accept Christ but do not abide in Him are likewise "withered" (Jn. 15:6). John's emphasis upon 'abiding' in Christ likely has reference to the need to accept John's message about Christ and abide in it, rather than wandering off and back to Judaism. Both James and Peter seem to allude to this point of the parable in their teaching that the word of God stands forever, whereas flesh withers away (James 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:24). As we will note on 13:22, the seed is to become the person. Those who do not wither are those who have the seed within them, the power of eternal life which endures. "Because they had no root, they withered away" (Mt. 13:6) is alluded to in Jn. 15:6 concerning the branches of the vine withering as a result of God's word not abiding in them. The connection between the plants of the sower parable and the branches of the vine is further evidence that the sower parable mainly concerns the response to the word of those *within* the ecclesia.

8:7 *And other fell amidst the thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it-* This of itself didn't mean that growth was impossible. The Lord's next parable makes that clear- the good seed brings forth fruit, clearly alluding to the 'good ground' of the sower parable, *despite* being surrounded by "tares", weeds, within which category are thorns (Mt. 13:26). The point of the later parable would therefore be to make the point that fruit can be brought forth *despite* a spiritual environment in which we have to grow and fruit next to thorns. "Thorns" were defined by the Lord as *people*- those who do not bring forth good fruit, even though they may claim to be true believers (Mt. 7:16). Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of 'thorns' as people ("He that bears thorns... is rejected"). The later interpretation in Mt. 13:22 is that the thorns are the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of "this world"- and yet these abstract things operate upon the believer through persons, through people devoted to them. For we all 'are' the principles which we live by; and our example and influence upon others is more significant than we realize. Those people in the first instance were Jewish people in first century Palestinian society who strangled the growth of the seed in the hearts of people by their attitudes and the pressure of their example. We note that "this world" in the first instance referred to the *aion* around Jesus- which was the Jewish world. Especially in John's Gospel the phrase carries that meaning in most occurrences.

The next parable in Matthew explains that both good and bad seed 'spring / grow up'; the point is that the good seed continues to bear fruit despite this. They intertwined with the roots of the crop beneath the ground, and later kept light from reaching the plants. Again the suggestion is that there was a specific group of people [the Jewish religious leadership] who were damaging the growth of seed which had begun to grow [in response to the preaching of John]. And yet the interpretation is that the thorns represent the worry of the world, and wealth (Mt. 13:22). We can understand these things in the context of the Jews loving wealth and the whole system of Judaism, the Jewish 'world', making them worry about appearances to the point that the real seed of the word grows no more. The same can be seen in legalistic forms of Christianity today, where appearance to others becomes all important and thereby real spirituality goes out of the window.

"Choked" is again language more relevant to persons. The same word is found in the Lord's description of the man who initially accepted forgiveness from God and then went and 'choked' or 'took by the throat' his brother (Mt. 18:28). That man who was initially forgiven and then finally condemned speaks in the primary context of those who responded to John's message of forgiveness, but ended up condemned because of their aggression towards their brother- the Christians. Again, those who choked the response of others to the word are the members of Jewish society. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "cumbered" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time (Lk. 10:40). We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

8:8 *And other fell into the good ground, and grew, and brought forth fruit a hundredfold-* The next parable in Matthew is clearly related to this parable of the sower. There, the same word is used for the "good seed", the "children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:24,38). The ground refers to the hearts of people; but in the parable of the good seed, the seed itself is paralleled with the person. The word had become flesh in them, as it was in the Lord Himself (Jn. 1:14). John the Baptist had preached about the need to be a "good" plant bearing good fruit, or else face condemnation (Mt. 3:10, and repeated by the Lord in Mt. 7:17-19). The appeal was for the audience to be as John intended, to follow where his teaching led. They had initially accepted that teaching but had failed to follow where it led. And this was to be their condemnation.

Mk. 4:8 adds the significant detail that it was the *fruit* that the plant yielded which "sprung up and increased". The picture is of a plant

bringing forth seeds which themselves germinate into separate plants and bear fruit. This can be interpreted in at least two ways:

- 1) True spiritual development in our lives is a cumulative upward spiral; successfully developing spiritual fruit leads to developing yet more.
- 2) The new plants which come out of our fruit refer to our converts, both from the world and those within the ecclesia whom we help to yield spiritual fruit. There is another link here with the parable of the vine bearing fruit: "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should *go* and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:8,16). This connects with Christ's command to them to *go* into the world preaching the Gospel and thereby making converts. In this sense our spiritual fruiting is partly through our bringing others to glorify God through the development of a God-like character. It is in this context of using the word for preaching and personal spiritual development that we receive the glorious encouragement "that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he (will) give it you" (Jn. 15:7,16). Every believer who truly strives to bring forth fruit to God's glory, both in preaching to others and in personal character development, will find this promise constantly true.

God works like this because He is prepared to accept that different people will make something different of His Truth. The parable of the sower shows this in that the "good ground" brings forth 30, 60 or 100 fold. Some believers respond three times as actively to the Gospel as others; yet they will all be accepted at the end. I see a connection between this parable and the Lord's words to the rich, righteous young man: "'If you will be *perfect*...' sell what you've got; and then you'll receive *100 fold* in this life, and eternal life in the Kingdom' (Mt. 19:12,21). Presumably, that man at that time was (say) in the 30 or 60 fold category. The Lord wanted him in the 100 fold category. But if that man didn't sell all that he had, it doesn't necessarily mean that Christ would have rejected him ultimately. In this context, He says: " Many that are first (in this life) will be last (least- in the Kingdom); and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:30). Those who don't sell all that they have will be in the Kingdom, but least in it. The poor of his world, rich in faith, will be great in the Kingdom (James 2:5). We need to ask ourselves whether we really accept the parable of the sower; whether we are strong enough to let another brother be weak, to accept that even if he's in the 30 fold category, he's still acceptable to his Lord, just living on a different level. Indeed, it isn't for us to go very deeply at all into how exactly the Lord sees others; because we can't know. The point to note is that God wants us to rise up the levels of commitment. Paul was persuaded that the Romans were "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge", but he prayed they would be filled yet further (Rom. 15:13,14).

Growth was in fact possible on each type of ground, and the New Testament contains examples of where this happened. I suggest that in fact there are only three types of ground- the way side, the rocky and the thorny. These three types of ground would then match the three types of good ground- which gave 30,60 and 100 fold increase. Putting the gospel records together, the Lord's description of the good ground contains elements of the initially good response from the three bad types of ground. The good ground represents a good state of mind- for the ground is clearly to be understood as the heart of those receiving the word. This category therefore refers to those on the three other types of ground who *did* respond to the end, who overcame the pressures upon them not to respond further. This also removes the moral problem which is otherwise presented- in that it would appear that the seed of the word is spread, but the good ground people can do nothing else but respond, and the bad ground people can do nothing but not ultimately respond because of who they are by nature and where they are situated in life. The good ground category had to 'keep the word' (Lk. 8:15)- they didn't let men tread it underfoot nor birds take it away. Given their position in life, even by the wayside, they still responded by keeping the word. There was an element of choice and human effort required- rather than some categories being inevitably unable to keep the word because of their location in life and surrounding influences upon them. In this we see huge encouragement in our cluttered lives today, subject as they are to negative spiritual influences which at times seem too strong to resist. And we are further encouraged in our own sowing of the seed- nobody is incapable of response, from the deepest room in a strict Moslem family to sharing a one room apartment in Europe surrounded by materialistic, unGodly people.

Jeremias claims that a yield of tenfold was considered good in first century Palestine (Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1972) p. 150). Even if that is somewhat conservative, the point is that the seed on good ground yielded amazingly. This element of unreality speaks of how each person in the 'good ground' category will experience growth and blessing out of proportion to their tiny spiritual beginnings. The parable of the mustard seed makes the same point. Amazing harvests is the language of the Messianic Kingdom, both Biblically and in Judaism. The beginning of the Kingdom experience is in our response to God's word in this life. The one hundred fold response is huge- but then so is the loss. It's as if the Lord is trying to encourage the disciples after the conclusions drawn about the general failure of the ministry of John- and therefore the Lord's also. His point is that despite all the failure, *some* will respond, and their response and blessing will be so huge that this more than counterbalances all the failure of others. If we

can bring one person towards eternity, this is so wonderful that all the rejection of our message is worthwhile.

In Palestine, sowing precedes ploughing. The sower sows on the path which the villagers have beaten over the stubble, since he intends to plough up the path with the rest of the field. He sows amongst thorns because they too will be ploughed in. And it has been suggested that the rocky ground was land with underlying limestone which barely shows above the surface. Even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. Many of the parables have an element of unreality about them, designed to focus our attention on a vital aspect of teaching. The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide. We should desire to see the spread of God's ways, His Truth, His will, the knowledge of the real Christ, to as many as possible. The word / seed which fell into good ground produced fruit. This connects with Jn. 15:5,7, which says that the branches of the vine bring forth fruit through the word abiding in them. Likewise the good ground keeps the word and continually brings forth fruit (Lk. 8:15). It is common for us to learn something from the word, apply it for a few days, and then forget it. Yet surely the implication is that if our hearts are truly open to the word, it will have permanent effects upon us, if the word abides in us. For this reason it is necessary to pray at least daily for our minds to be good ground for the word, and to retain what we already comprehend. Those on the good ground who hear and understand in Mt. 13:23 are described as those who hear and keep the word (Lk. 8:16). True understanding of the word's teaching is therefore related to an ongoing practical application of it. We may read a human book and understand it at the moment of reading; understanding God's word is quite a different concept. Truly understanding it means keeping it in our heart and therefore in our lives. The seed fell on good ground, "sprang up, and bare fruit"; indeed, it kept on bearing fruit (Lk. 8:8,15). The plant being sown was therefore a repeating crop. True response to the word will lead to wave after wave of spiritual progression. Again, we see that the sower parable is describing an ongoing response to the word- it keeps on being sown by the believer keeping the word, and fruit is continuously brought forth.

*As he said these things, he cried: He that has ears to hear, let him hear-* The Lord so wanted their response. The very muscles of the Lord's face, His body language, would have reflected an earnest, *burning* care and compassion. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost; He put His whole personality into the task. And we beseech men "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV). We are to be *His* face to this world and to our

brethren. With raised eyebrows, lines showing in our forehead, one eye half closed... our body language should reflect the depth of our concern for others. Having spoken of how our attitudes to God's word will elicit from Him varying responses, the Lord *cried*, loudly, "he that has ears to hear, *let him hear*" (Lk. 8:8). There is then the sickening anti-climax of :9, where the disciples ask Him whatever His parable meant. One senses a moment of silence in which the Lord composed Himself and camouflaged the pain of His disappointment; and then His essential hopefulness returns in :10: "Unto you it is given (potentially, anyway) to know (understand) the mysteries (parables) of the Kingdom of God".

There is a fine point of translation in Lk. 8:8 which needs to be appreciated: "As he said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (ASV and Greek). It seems that the Lord was 'throwing out' this challenge several times, as He spoke the parable. As the sower sows seed, so the Lord was challenging His hearers to decide what type of ground they were, as they heard the parable.

8:9 *And his disciples asked him what this parable meant*- The disciples' response would have been a cutting anti-climax for the Lord after his impassioned plea of :8. According to Matthew, this was His first parable, and it marked the Lord's turning away from Israel and focus upon the disciples. They were taken aback by His changed method of teaching, probably noticing that the eagerly listening multitudes had not properly understood it, overhearing all kinds of wild guesses at what the Lord was maybe driving at.

8:10 *And he said: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest the parables remain as parables; so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand*- The things which God has prepared for those who love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

Here we see the element of predestination- understanding is "given". Paul in Romans speaks of such predestination as the supreme evidence of our salvation by grace. One example of the Lord Jesus' emphasis on our salvation being through grace rather than our works is found in the way the parables teach that our acceptance is to some degree dependent on our predestination. Thus the parable of the types of ground suggests that we are good or bad ground at the time the seed is first sown; the fish are good or bad at the time they first enter the net; the wise virgins take the oil with them from the start of their vigil. I would suggest that this is not just part of the story. It was evidently within the Lord's ability to

construct stories which featured the idea of bad seed or fish etc. changing to good, and vice versa. But He didn't; indeed, His emphasis seems to have been on the idea of predestination. This isn't to decry the effort for spirituality which we must make; but His stress of the predestination factor is surely to remind us of the degree to which our calling and salvation is by pure grace.

They the supposed disciples, learners, of the Lord Jesus had been as dumb as the crowd; but by grace alone the Lord had privately explained the parables to them. And our understanding of true Bible teaching is likewise a gift of grace, when we are every bit as obtuse as the people in darkness who surround us.

8:11 *Now the parable is this. The seed is the word of God-* The word of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:19). The parable gives the impression that the ground was in a certain condition when the seed was first sown; there seems no hint at the possibility of changing the ground, although we will see later that there is a sense in which this is possible. The stony ground, for example, is in that state as soon as the seed lands upon it. It seems the Lord is showing us how God looks down upon the preaching of the Gospel to various people, seeing that He speaks about things which are future as if they are already (Rom. 4:17). He knows the type of ground which each of us will ultimately be. Therefore, as far as God is concerned, we are good ground, or whatever, at the time of our first encounter with the Gospel, even if we are initially stony or thistle-filled.

The seed is the word; but "the word" doesn't necessarily mean the whole Bible (although the whole Bible is of course inspired). The phrase specifically means the word of the power of the Gospel, by which we were ushered into spiritual being. And *this* is what brings forth fruit, through our 'patient' and continued response to it. We were born again, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God... and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:23,25). Time and again the New Testament uses "the word of God" or "the word of the Lord (Jesus)" as shorthand for the preaching of the basic Gospel. *This* is the seed, this is the source of new life, this is what can lead to new character and behaviour in us. James speaks of being "doers of the word" (1:22,25), using the same word as in the parable of the sower, there translated 'to bring forth fruit'. Note that "the word of God" in the NT often refers specifically to the Gospel. James foresaw the possibility of hearing the word of the Gospel but not doing it, not bringing forth what those basic doctrines imply. He foresees how we can admire it as a vain man seeing his reflection in a mirror. We are not to be "forgetful hearers" of the word of the basics, the "implanted word" (1:21 RV- another

reference to the sower parable). We aren't to learn the Gospel and then forget those doctrines. We are to be doers of them.

*8:12 Those by the way side are they that have heard; then comes the Devil-* The parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither suffer ye them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).

The entire context of the parable and the preceding chapter in Matthew is that it was the Jewish world system which hindered people from further responding to the seed / word about Jesus which they had first heard from John the Baptist. As I showed at length in [The Real Devil](#), the Jewish system is frequently described as the 'satan' or adversary of the early church. By 'the wicked one', the Lord's audience would've understood 'satan'; and the Lord is redefining their view of 'satan' as being not so much the Gentiles or some cosmic being, as their own religious elders and system.

*And takes away-* The same word for "takes away" had recently been used by the Lord in Mt. 11:12 about how the violent take away the Kingdom. I suggested in the commentary there that this is possible to understand as referring to the Jewish leaders stopping people entering the Kingdom of Jesus. In this case, "the wicked one" is again identified as the Jews. The word is also used about the wolf 'catching away' the sheep (Jn. 10:12)- and in the same passage in John 10, it is the wolf who kills Jesus in His mortal combat with him in order to save the rest of the sheep. Clearly the wolf there refers to the Jewish leaders who ravaged the flock, indeed John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which speaks of Israel's priesthood as responsible for the scattering of the sheep. Mt. 13:19 describes the evil one taking away the word out of our heart. However can we resist that evil one? Paul had his eye on this question in 2 Thess. 3:1,3, where he speaks of the word being *with them*, and also of the Lord keeping them from the evil one. Paul knew that the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw that the power of God is greater than our low nature.

*The word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved-* Clearly the types of ground represent types of heart or mind. In addition to the elements of unreality in the parables, there are other features which shout out for our attention. Often details are omitted which we would expect to see merely as part of the story. For example, the parable of the ten girls says nothing at all about the bride; the bridegroom alone is focused upon, along with the bridesmaids. Where's the bride in the

story? Surely the point is that in the story, the bridesmaids are treated as the bride; this is the wonder of the whole thing, that we as mere bridesmaids are in fact the bride herself. Another example would be the way in which the sower's presence is not really explained. No reference is made to the importance of rain or ploughing in making the seed grow. The preacher is unimportant; we are mere voices, as was John the Baptist. But it is the type of ground we are which is so all important; and the type of ground refers to the type of heart we have (Mt. 13:19). The state of the human heart is what is so crucial. Yet another example is in the way that there is no explanation for exactly why the tenants of the vineyard so hate the owner and kill His Son. This teaches of the irrational hatred the Jews had towards the Father and Son. And why would the owner send His Son, when so clearly the other servants had been abused? Why not just use force against them? Here again we see reflected the inevitable grace of the Father in sending the Son to be the Saviour of the Jewish world.

*8:13 And those on the rock are they who, when they have heard, receive the word with joy-* Belief and joy are therefore paralleled. The later references to our joy *remaining* unto the end of our spiritual path surely allude here (Jn. 15:11; 16:22; Acts 20:24; Heb. 3:6). Note how in Jn. 16:22 the joy of the disciples could be taken from them by those who took Christ from them; another hint that the persecution which choked the joy came from the Jews, who were those who took Christ from them. Joy and faith are linked many times in the New Testament; we must ask whether we really have the joy which is the proof of real faith.

*But these have no root, they for a while believe, but in time of temptation fall away-* It is quite possible that our Lord's sad prophecy of the disciples being offended because of having to identify with his sufferings looked back to this parable, concerning those who impulsively respond to the word in joy, but are offended because they have no deep root (Mk. 4:17 = Mk. 14:27; Mt. 26:31). The fact that the disciples became good ground after this encourages us that we can change the type of ground which we are on initially receiving the seed.

*8:14 And that which fell among the thorns, these are those that have heard-* One of the ineffable sadnesses of Paul's life must have been to see his converts falling away. Yet he seems to have comforted himself by seeing their defection in terms of the sower parable. Many a missionary has been brought close to that parable for the same reason. It supplies an explanation, an answer, a comfort, as 'Friends one by one depart (some we saw as pillars to our own faith, those we thought would always be there) / Lonely and sad our heart'. Thus Paul saw Demas as a seed among thorns (Mt. 13:22 = 2 Tim. 4:10); he saw Elymas as a weed (Mt. 13:38 = Acts 13:10); and he pleads with the Romans not to slip into the weed category (Mt. 13:41 Gk. = Rom. 14:13).

Thorns were symbolic of false teachers in the Old Testament ecclesia (Ez. 2:6; Is. 33:12-14). It is a repeated theme that thorns are devoured by fire (Ex. 22:6; Ps. 118:12; Ecc. 7:6; Is. 10:17), looking ahead to the destruction of all false elements of the ecclesia. The thorns easily equate with the tares of the next parable, which represent false teachers (primarily the Judaist infiltrators of the first century ecclesia). It would seem from this that some members of the ecclesia are never right with God, but exist purely for the spiritual trial of others; although it cannot be over-emphasized that it is quite wrong to attempt to label individuals as this 'thorn' element. Thus Jesus pointed out that grapes (the true Israel) and thorns can be apparently similar (Mt. 7:16), but "Ye shall know them by their *fruits*". The thorns of the sower parable and those they influenced were "unfruitful". However, seeing that "the thorns sprang up *with it*" (Lk. 8:7), there was some genuine spiritual growth, matched by the appearance of this among the thorns too. Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of the thorns as believers who grew up within the ecclesia. This indicates the dual-mindedness of those who only partially commit themselves to the word; knowledge like this should play an active part in our self-examination. Because the thorns outwardly look like true believers, having an outward appearance of spiritual growth even more zealous and strong than that of the plants which they choke, it is impossible to personally identify the "thorns"; but there can be no doubt that, according to the parable, they *must* be present among the ecclesia. The seed "fell *among* thorns" (Mt. 13:7), showing that this thorn category were already within the ecclesia when the person who was to be choked was converted. We have shown that Biblically the thorns are false teachers; yet Jesus interprets them as "the care (Gk. 'divisions'- the double mindedness of serving two masters) of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mt.13:22). The conclusion to be drawn is that the false teachers are responsible for the new convert being choked by these things. Mk. 4:19 says that these lusts enter into the convert's heart. Therefore the thorns must influence the person's thinking, so that he follows after these things until "he becometh unfruitful". The Greek for "choked" is from a root meaning 'association, companionship'. Marshall's Interlinear renders the Greek text of Lk. 8:7 in keeping with this idea: "Growing up with the thorns choked it". Thus it is through close association with the thorn element already in the ecclesia, that the new convert who enters it is corrupted. We each have to ask 'What type of ground are we as an ecclesia? Do *I* have thorn elements to me...?'

*But as they go on their way, they are choked-* Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, Mt. 13:22 says that riches choke a man's response to the word. 1 Tim. 6:9 warns that those who *want to be rich* are choked by their *desire* for riches. Likewise Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone

wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because "riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His penman.

*With cares and riches and the pleasures of life-* In our age as never before, given more possibilities and knowledge of possible futures and what could go wrong, we have as never before the temptation to be full of such care. The same word is used in Lk. 21:34 about the "cares" which will be a feature of the last days- both of AD70 and today. But in the first instance, the 'world' in view was the Jewish world. There are not a few Bible passages which confirm this view of materialism, as *the* besetting temptation of every human soul, and which confirm that therefore our attitude to materialism, serving God or mammon, is the litmus test of our spirituality. The parable of the sower teaches that for those who begin well in the Truth, who don't fall away immediately or get discouraged by persecution, "the deceitfulness of riches... the cares and pleasures of this life" will be their temptation. I would have expected the Lord to either speak in more general terms about the flesh, or to reel off a list of common vices. But instead He focuses on the desire for wealth as the real problem. The love of wealth is the root of *all* evil behaviour (1 Tim. 6:10). And I would go further, and suggest that so many of the excuses we hear which relate to "I haven't got time" (for reading, preaching, meeting, writing...) are related to this desire for material improvement. The desire for advancement takes an iron grip on a man's soul. As we move through life, our thinking is concerned with prices, with possibilities, with schemings... what *ought* to be the surpassingly dominating aspect of our life, the Son of God and His Truth, takes a poor second place. The connection between the desire for riches and the devil (our nature) is powerful. The devil is a deceiver. And 'riches' is also a deceiver (Mt. 13:22). That we know for sure. The desire for material things, for the false security of bank balances, the excuse that we are allowing ourselves to be so preoccupied for the sake of our families, the idea that we are only human beings and so God will let us be dominated by these worries... all this is the deception of the flesh. God *does* remember that we are dust, and yes, of course we *must* provide for our own, some thought (but not *anxious* thought) must be given to tomorrow (Mt. 6:25,31,34). But these facts must never make us push God's Truth into *second* place. The lilies of the field are fed and dressed by God without anxiously worrying about it. Israel on their wilderness journey were miraculously provided with food *and clothing*, surely to prefigure God's basic material care of His spiritual Israel of later years. David, all his life long, never saw the seed of the righteous begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

*And bring no fruit to maturity-* See on Lk. 15:31. The word becoming unfruitful in Mt. 13:22 is matched by it yielding "no fruit" (Mk. 4:7) and no fruit being perfected in Lk. 8:14. The conclusion from this is that spiritual fruit which is developed but does not remain is not really fruit at all. There is the constant temptation for us to recognize just a bit of apparent 'growth' within us, and feel satisfied with it- rather than taking on board the concept of the word having a fullness of effect upon every part of our lives. Given the lesson of the thorns, there is no doubt that one must watch their friends even within the ecclesia. "Thorns and snares are in the way of the forward: he that doth keep (the Hebrew for "keep" is often used in Proverbs about keeping the word) his soul shall be far from them" (Prov. 22:5). The language of thorns must connect with the curse upon Eden; the ecclesia, the paradise of God, must always have its thorns in order to spiritually exercise Adam, the spiritual gardener. As our brother's keeper, we need to be aware that after conversion, a whole gamut of new temptations face the convert. *After* he has heard the word, he is choked with the cares, riches and pleasures (Lk. 8:14). Yet these things existed before he heard the word; the point is that they became new temptations after his response to the word. A concerted effort to understand, with Biblical guidance, the pressures upon new converts might help save a few more of the many which are being lost. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "cumbered" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time (Lk. 10:40). We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

8:15 *And that in the good ground are those with an honest and good heart, who having heard the word, hold it fast and bring forth fruit with patience-* See on Lk. 10:37. Paul tells the Hebrews and Romans to have the patient, fruit-bearing characteristics of the good ground (Lk. 8:15 = Rom. 2:7; Heb. 10:36). The word/ seed which fell into good ground produced fruit. Thus connects with Jn. 15:5,7, which says that the branches of the vine bring forth fruit through the word abiding in them. Likewise the good ground keeps the word and continually brings forth fruit. It is common for us to learn something from the word, apply it for a few days, and then forget it. Yet surely the implication is that if our hearts are truly open to the word, it will have permanent effects upon us, if the word abides in us. For this reason it is necessary to pray at least daily for our minds to be good ground for the word, and to retain what we already comprehend. Those on the good ground who hear and understand in Mt. 13:23 are described as those who hear and keep the word (Lk. 8:16). True understanding of the word's teaching is therefore related to an

ongoing practical application of it. We may read a human book and understand it at the moment of reading; understanding God's word is quite a different concept. Truly understanding it means keeping it in our heart and therefore in our lives. The seed fell on good ground, "sprang up, and bare fruit"; indeed, it kept on bearing fruit (Lk. 8:8,15). The plant being sown was therefore a repeating crop. True response to the word will lead to wave after wave of spiritual progression. Again, we see that the sower parable is describing an ongoing response to the word- it keeps on being sown by the believer keeping the word, and fruit is continuously brought forth.

The good ground "accepts" (Mk. 4:20), "holds fast" (Lk. 8:15) the word. In our present culture of anti-intellectualism, it can be overlooked that any real acceptance of a message, let alone holding onto it, must require a degree of 'understanding'. We can hear the Bible explained and at that point *understand* intellectually. But this is something different to real understanding; for if we truly apprehend the message, we will receive it deep within us and keep that understanding ever present in our subsequent actions. The background of the parable is that it was given the same day as the Lord's lament over the lack of response to John's message and therefore His own ministry (Mt. 13:1). The very fact there is good ground, and three different types of it matching the three different types of failure, is therefore an encouragement to the disciples (and all) that God's word doesn't 'return void' but does ultimately achieve an end in some lives. Indeed it has even been suggested that the parable of the sower is a kind of *midrash* or interpretation of the Isaiah 55 passage about the word going forth and not returning void. Ultimately, despite rejection, setbacks and only a minority responding- the work of the Kingdom will succeed. That is one aspect of the parable.

The parable of the sower concluded by lamenting that the Lord's general Jewish audience did *not* understand, and He spoke the parables knowing they wouldn't understand and would be confirmed in this. And He stressed that a feature of the good ground is that His message is understood. In this context, the Lord commends the disciples because they saw and heard, in the sense of understanding (Mt. 13:13,15,16,23). Yet so evidently they didn't understand. And yet the Lord was so thrilled with the fact they understood a very little that He counted them as the good ground that understood.

Many of the Lord's parables had some oblique reference to Himself. The parable of the sower speaks of the type of ground which gave one hundred fold yield- and surely the Lord was thinking of Himself in this. And yet the whole point of the parable is that all who receive the Lord's word have the possibility of responding in this way. Or take the related parable of the mustard seed [=God's word of the Gospel] which grows up into a huge tree under which all the birds can find refuge (Mk. 4:31,32).

This image is replete with allusion to Old Testament pictures of God's future Kingdom, and the growth of Messiah from a small twig into a great tree (Ez. 17:22). Here we see the power of the basic Gospel message—truly responded to, it can enable us to have a share in the very heights to which the Lord Jesus is exalted.

The parable of the sower leaves us begging the question: 'So how can we be good ground?'. Mark's record goes straight on to record that the Lord right then said that a candle is lit so as to publicly give light and not to be hidden (Mk. 4:21). He is speaking of how our conversion is to witness to others. But He says this in the context of being good ground. To respond to the word ourselves, our light must be spreading to all. The only way for the candle of our faith to burn is for it to be out in the open air. Hidden under the bucket of embarrassment or shyness or an inconsistent life, it will go out. We will lose our faith if we don't in some sense witness to it. Witnessing is in that sense for our benefit. When the disciples ask how ever they can accomplish the standards which the Lord set them, He replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him. We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them. The ecclesias, groups of believers, are lampstands (Rev. 2:5 cp. Ps. 18:28). We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, letting laziness (under a bed) or worldly care (a bushel) distract us; because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22).

Luke goes on to record the Lord's teaching about a candle. Burning brightly before others is therefore the way to be good ground.

8:16 *Nobody, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed; but puts it on a stand, so that they that enter may see the light-* See on Lk. 6:47. We are compared to a candle that is lit (cp. our baptism) *so that* it may give light to others (Lk. 8:16; 11:33); the woman (the Lord Jesus) lights a candle (He uses believers) to find his lost coin (through our efforts) (Lk. 15:8; this must be seen in the context of the other two references in Luke to lighting a candle). If we don't give light (God's word, Ps. 119:105) to others, we are a candle under a bucket, and therefore we will lose our faith, the flame will go out. So it's hard not to conclude that if we don't naturally give the light to others, we don't believe. The very nature of a lit candle is that it gives light; *all* candles do

this, not just some. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this.

*8:17 For nothing is hid, that shall not be revealed; nor anything secret, that shall not be known and come to light-* Nothing is done secretly that will not then come to the light- and therefore we should come to the light right now, living life in God's light and before His judgment (Jn. 3:20,21). This not only means we should not sin 'in secret', but more positively, we should feel and realize His constant affirmation of us for thoughts and actions which are invisible to others or for which we do not receive any thank.

The Lord taught that either the 'devil' will "take away" the word from the rejected, or He will "take away" what He has given them at the last day (Lk. 8:12,17). In this sense, the word "abiding" in us is a foretaste of the day of judgment- if we don't let it abide, and the 'devil' of the world or our own humanity takes it away from us, then effectively such people are living out the condemnation process even in this life.

*8:18 Take heed therefore how you hear. For whoever has, to him shall be given-* This is a clear statement of the upward spiral which we can experience. What we 'have' in our commitment to His word will be added to. The faithful do not get the blessing solely by their own effort and application to God's word, but through the gift /grace of God. The context requires we understand this as 'having' the ability to hear the Lord's words and practically 'understand' them (Mt. 13:9). Mark speaks of what a man has, whereas Lk. 8:18 AV mg. more precisely speaks of what a man *thinks* he has. Matthew's record adds to "shall be given" the idea of 'given in abundance'. This Greek word for "abundance" is used about the 'abundance' which characterizes the life of the believer. But the 'abundance' is not of material things, but of understanding of and thereby relationship with the Lord.

*And whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that which he thinks he has-* See on Lk. 13:28.

The language is difficult, but makes good sense if we understand 'what a man has' as referring to what that generation had due to responding to John's preaching; but because they had not followed where it led, they were left with nothing. The ideas are similar to the parable the Lord had just given of the demon being thrown out of the house of Israel by John the Baptist, but then returning. The language is arrestingly and purposefully strange. How can a man who has nothing have what he has taken away from him? All is clearer once we accept the initial context as being the Lord's commentary upon Israel's initial response to John the

Baptist, and subsequent rejection of his ministry insofar as they rejected Jesus as Messiah. What they had once had- an initial response to the word sown- was now being taken away from them. This likewise explains the language of the next verse- that it was by the process of seeing and hearing that they became blind and deaf. It was their initial seeing and hearing of John's message which had made them now totally blind and deaf- because they had not responded to it.

In the sower context, those who appear to have been committed to the word but have now fallen away (the seed on the rocks, wayside and amongst thorns) will find that their time of apparent commitment to it was nothing; they have nothing if they did not endure to the end, and what they appeared to have will be taken away from them.

8:19 *And there came to him his mother and relatives; and they could not come to him because of the crowd-* Mt. 12:46-50 five times repeats the phrase "his mother and his brethren", as if to link her with them. In the parallel Mk. 3:21,31-35 we read of how "his own" family thought He was crazy and came to talk to Him. Then we read that it was His mother and brothers who demanded an audience with Him, perhaps linking Mary with her other children. Their cynicism of Jesus, their lack of perception of Him, came to influence her- for He effectively rebuffs her special claims upon Him by saying that His mother and brethren are all who hear God's word. Clearly the brothers, who didn't believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:5) influenced her. When He speaks of how His real family are those who hear the word of God and do it, the Lord is alluding to Dt. 33:9, where we have the commendation of Levi for refusing to recognize his apostate brethren at the time of the golden calf: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren... for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant". The last sentence is the essence of the Lord's saying that His true family are those who keep God's word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

8:20 *And it was told him: Your mother and your relatives stand outside, desiring to see you-* Note how in Mk. 3:32 we read that "your mother and your brothers are outside looking [seeking] for you", and in Mk. 1:37 the same word occurred: "all men seek for you"; and also in Lk. 2:45, of how Mary looked for Jesus. The similarity is such that the intention may be to show us how Mary had been influenced by the world's perception of Him. And we too can be influenced by the world's light hearted view of the Lord of glory. It's so easy to allow their patterns of language use to lead us into blaspheming, taking His Name in vain, seeing His religion as just a hobby, a social activity... In passing, it was not that the Lord was insensitive or discounted her. It is in Mt. 12:46 that Mary wanted to speak with Him, and presumably she did- but then He goes to His home town,

back to where she had come from (Mt. 13:54), as if He did in fact pay her attention. See on Mk. 6:3.

*8:21 But he answered and said to them: My mother and my relatives are these that hear the word of God and do it-* This refers back to His recent parable of the good seed that "did" the word which they heard (8:15). But surely that group of fascinated, surface-interested onlookers didn't all come into the good seed category, who held the word to the end, all their lives? He was so positive about others' faith. It has been observed that "in a kinship-oriented society like Israel, it must have been startling for people to hear of a bond that was even deeper than that of the natural family". And so it is in many parts of the world today.

The parallel records speak of hearing and doing the will of God; Luke has "the word of God". We can too easily assume that every reference to "the word of God" is to the book known as the Bible. The Bible is indeed "the word of God", but the idea is used in other ways within Biblical language; and here it seems to mean the will or intention of God.

*8:22 Now it came to pass on one of those days that he boarded a boat, he and his disciples, and he said to them: Let us go over to the other side of the lake. And they cast off-* So often we encounter the Lord's desire for solitude, avoiding crowds and pressure to perform mass healings. His regular crossings of the lake were largely to avoid these situations. The constant outpouring of energy from Him accounts for the complete exhaustion of :23. In these things we see the Lord's utter humanity.

*8:23 But as they sailed, he fell asleep; and there came down a storm of wind on the lake, and they were filling with water; and were in danger for their lives-* Mt. 8:26 uses a word for "storm" which is also translated "earthquake". The waves from the earthquake "covered" or 'hid' [s.w.] the ship. Given the intensity of the situation it seems unlikely the Lord was really "asleep". Here we have a picture of the apparent silence of God. He appeared to be asleep, He remained with eyes closed, lying there as the boat was hidden beneath the waves. But He did this surely to pique the intensity of faith and urgency of appeal in their prayer to Him for salvation. And the apparent silence of the Lord in our lives is ultimately to try to achieve the same effect.

The Greek for "sleep" could also stand the translation 'lying down to rest'. But how could He appear to be resting or asleep in such a situation? I suggest He did this to elicit their desire for Him. Likewise He made as if He would walk by them during another storm, and acted as if He would go on further on the walk to Emmaus. It was all in order to elicit their urgent desire for Him. And so it is with His apparent silence to us; that silence or lack of immediate response is in order to heighten our final sense of His grace and action. We see it in how He delayed going to Lazarus; it is the principle of Is. 30:18: "Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be

gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him".

8:24 *And they came to him and woke him, saying-* Literally, to raise up. It seemed He didn't want to do anything- until they imposed upon Him with all their energy and intensity of focus upon Him and Him alone as their Saviour. And the whole situation was raised up to that end.

*Master, master, we perish! And he awoke, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water; and they ceased, and there was a calm-* The same Greek words for 'save' and 'perish' also occur together in Mt. 16:25, where the Lord teaches that if we seek to save our lives in this world then we will perish. He could thereby be making a criticism of the disciples' plea to be saved from perishing; His sense would then have been 'You should have an even greater, focused intensity upon your need to be saved spiritually and not to perish eternally'. Again the two words occur together in Mt. 18:11, where the Lord says that He came to save those who are perishing- and again, He has in view spiritual, ultimate salvation. The perishing disciples on the lake, in need of saving, are therefore being set up as a picture of the intensity of desire we should have for forgiveness and salvation. The way essential intention is understood as prayer is perhaps reflected in the way Matthew records that the disciples prayed during the storm on the lake: "Lord, save us, we are perishing!" (Mt. 8:25). Mark records that their actual words were "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). Perhaps this was read by Matthew's inspiration as prayer. An alternative would be that they firstly said the words recorded by Mark, and then those by Matthew- in which case we could perhaps notice the difference between "Teacher!" and "Lord!", as if the higher they perceived the greatness of the Lord Jesus, the more moved they were to prayer.

Mark records that they actually said: "Don't you care that we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). His whole life and death were because He *did* so care that they would not perish (Jn. 3:16). It's so reminiscent of a child's total, if temporary, misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the parent's love and self-sacrifice.

The Greek for "rebuked" can mean just this, but it is also translated 'to solemnly charge'. There are times in the Gospels where the sovereign authority of Jesus as Lord simply shines through. He did His work with a minimum of such displays of authority. Yet there are enough of them to make us appreciate how He could so easily have 'come down from the cross'; such incidents of sovereign authority in His ministry simply pave the way for us to appreciate the degree of self-control and wilful sacrifice and suffering which He achieved on the cross. The peoples of the first

century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water – that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God ‘rebuking’ the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we’re effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God’s people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He ‘rebuked’ the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to describe how He ‘rebuked’ demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn’t believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of ‘rebuking’ demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to ‘rebuke’ them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17–20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that’s your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working ‘in My name’.

Mark records that the Lord commanded the waves “Peace, be still”. His authoritative “Peace, be still” (Mk. 4:39) was probably primarily addressed to the Angels controlling the natural elements. The reference to Angels ‘ministering’ to Him after the temptations suggests their inferiority. Thus He could summon twelve legions of Angels at the time of His greatest passion- maybe He remembered this incident and it was a temptation to Him to use this power over Angels at the crucifixion.

All three of the Synoptics use the same phrase for “a great calm” (Mk. 4:39; Lk. 8:24). It would’ve been a profound experience. The whole experience looks ahead to the calm of God’s Kingdom being brought about by intense latter day prayer during a tribulation so intense that unless it were shortened, the faithful would die. When the Lord calmed the raging sea into a still calmness, He was consciously replicating what happened when Jonah was cast into the sea. He said plainly that He understood Jonah’s willing submission to this as a type of His coming death. Therefore He saw the stilled sea as a symbol of the peace His sacrifice would achieve. And yet even during His ministry, He brought that calmness about; for in principle, His sacrifice was ongoing throughout His life. His blood is a symbol both of His cross and of the life He lived.

8:25 *And he said to them: Where is your faith?*- See on Lk. 7:8. They so often feared (Lk. 8:25; 9:34,45; Mk. 4:40; 6:50; 10:32); despite the Lord repeatedly telling them not to be afraid (Lk. 12:4,32; Jn. 14:27). The Gospel writers use their records to bring out their own fickleness.

After having been awed by the Lord's stilling of the storm, they are soon almost mocking Him for asking who had touched Him, when hundreds of the jostling crowd had touched Him (Lk. 8:25 cp. 45).

The question as to *why* they had little faith echoes to us. Why is it that faith is so hard for us? The track record of the Father and Son as rewarding faith is clear and without question. This *why* question drives each individual into personal introspection, reviewing our history, past and present influences upon us, the nature of our personality. *Why* do we not believe very strongly... ? The records of the Lord's words to the disciples in the sinking ship are significantly different within the Gospel records. Luke's record has Him upbraiding them: "Where is your faith?", as if He thought they had none. Matthew and Mark have Him commenting: "O you of *little* faith...". Putting them together, perhaps He said and implied something like: 'O you of little faith, you who think you have a little faith, in my view you have no *real* faith. Come on, where is your *real* faith, not the little bit which *you* think you have...?' (Mt. 8:26 cp. Mk. 4:40). The Greek for "little" faith is also translated 'almost'; as if the Lord is saying that they almost had faith, but in reality, had nothing. The Lord spoke of how just a little piece of real faith, like a grain of mustard seed, could result in so much (Mk. 11:12,13)- as if He recognized that there was pseudo-faith, and the real thing. *Oligopistos* ("little faith") is used five times by Matthew (Mt. 6:30; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20); it never occurs in Mark and only once in Luke. Perhaps Matthew's Gospel record was written to challenge those whose faith was small, and he encourages them that the disciples likewise started with "little faith".

It seems to me that all the Lord's servants are taught by increments, progressively, being given tests as to the degree to which they have grasped what the Lord has sought to teach them previously. And the Lord Jesus used a similar structured approach with the training of the twelve disciples. When the Lord commented "Have you not yet faith?" (Mk. 4:40 RV) it becomes immediately apparent that He was working with the twelve according to some program of spiritual development, and He was frustrated with their lack of response to it and slow progress. He surely has a similar program in place, and makes similar patient efforts, with each one of us. It is apparent to any reader of the Greek text of the Gospels that Jesus almost always left the verb "believe" without an object (e.g. Mk. 4:40; 5:34,36; 9:23). The question naturally arose: 'Believe *in what or whom?*'. And seeing the speaker of the words, the answer was there before their eyes.

*And being afraid they marvelled, saying to each other-* A word so often used about the response of people to miracles. The Lord had marvelled at another's faith, and now men marvel at His faith. A very positive mutuality is suggested here between the Lord and His followers.

*Who then is this-* What sort of man is this (Gk. *potapos*), they asked themselves. They felt very much their own humanity (hence they are called "the men" at this time), and their awe was because they sensed that Jesus too was a man. Accepting the humanity of the Lord Jesus is relatively easy on one level, as a matter of theology, exposition or logic. But then comes the far harder part- the awe at the fact that One who was like me could actually do so much and be so much. And this can lead to our feeling a kind of gap between Him and us, although we know He shared the same nature, this in a sense means that we feel the spiritual distance between Him and us very keenly. In later spiritual maturity, Peter seems to have reflected upon this gap and realized that it was bridgeable- for he uses a similar word in saying that because of God's grace, "what manner of persons (*potapous*) ought we to be...". Just as Jesus was human and yet different from unbelieving men, so that same element of difference can be seen in us. The whole consideration is an essay in His humanity and representation of us as humans.

"What manner of *man* is this?" was maybe said on perceiving that His actions were in fulfilment of the prophecy that *Yahweh* would still the waves of the sea. And in the context of stilling another storm, He comments: "Fear not, it is I" - not 'it's *me*'. He was surely suggesting they connect Him with the essence of the *Yahweh* Name, I am that I am. But the connection was only for those who would truly meditate and connect things together. As our Moslem friends have correctly pointed out many times, Jesus Himself never in so many words claimed to be Messiah. When others said this about Him, He replies by describing Himself as the "son of man". Indeed, this was His preferred self-image. He was intensely conscious of His humanity, His solidarity with us, and it was as if He directed us who later have believed to image Him first and foremost as a *man of our nature*. Of course, He was and is so much more than that. But because we are human, we have to image ourselves around a perfect human- Jesus, the real and full humanity as God intended. Here those who believe Jesus was God Himself place themselves at a distinct disadvantage- our understanding that Jesus did indeed come "in the flesh" ought to be a tremendous inspiration to us to be like Him. The power and compulsion of His life and example are surely diminished by relating to Him as God Himself.

*That he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?-* The disciples spoke of the wind and sea as if they were conscious entities, able to be obedient to the word of Jesus. The same word is used to describe the marvel of the people that "even the unclean spirits... obey Him" (Mk. 1:27). Just as wind and sea are not actually living entities, so unclean spirits likewise don't actually exist. But the disciples clearly had the idea in their head. Yet the scale of the Lord's power over such entities in fact showed their effective non-existence in practice.

8:26 *And they arrived in the region of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee-* The "Girgashites" of Dt. 7:1, some of the original inhabitants of Canaan who had never been cast out of the land as intended by God. These men stopped anyone passing along the way or road. The point may be that those whom Israel should've 'cast out' to secure their inheritance of the Kingdom were finally cast out by Christ. This lays the basis for the language of 'casting out' the demons into the lake.

8:27 *And when he had arrived upon the land, there met him a certain man out of the city, who had demons-* For a detailed study on this incident, see my discussion of it in [The Real Devil](#). See too commentary on Matthew 8 and Mark 5. There are many incidents where evidently the disciples were with Jesus, yet the focus of the record is entirely upon Him, so awed were they by the magnitude of His personality, and so selfless were they (Lk. 8:27; 10:38-41; Jn. 11:15,20-57). They are appealing for others to believe on the basis that they are recounting the story of how they heard Jesus, and eventually, very slowly and falteringly, had also come to believe.

We are not reading here about literal spirits. See on Mt. 5:7. But when we meet a similar situation in Acts 8:7 of unclean spirits crying out, the Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out". This is because, according to George Lamsa, "'Unclean spirits' is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics" (George Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1945) pp. 57,58). It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the devil and demons- he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons.

*And for a long time he had worn no clothes and abode not in any house, but in the tombs-* A fairly detailed case can be made that the man Legion was to be understood as representative of Judah in captivity, suffering for their sins, who despite initially opposing Christ (Legion ran up to Jesus just as he had 'run upon' people in aggressive fits earlier), could still repent as Legion did, be healed of their sins and be His witnesses to the world. This fits in with the whole theme which the Lord had- that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would not be by violent opposition to the Legions of Rome but by repentance and spiritual witness to the world. The point is, Israel were bound in fetters and beaten by the Gentiles because of their sins, which they were culpable of, for which they had responsibility and from which they could repent; rather than because they

had been taken over by powerful demons against their will. Here then are reasons for understanding Legion as representative of Judah under Gentile oppression:

- Israel were "A people... which remain among the tombs, and lodge in the monuments" (Is. 65:3-4).
- Legion was always "in the mountains"- the "high places" where Israel sinned (Is. 65:7; Hos. 4:13).
- The man's name, Legion, suggests he was under the ownership of Rome. The miracle occurred in Gentile territory, suggesting Judah in the Gentile dominated world.
- 'What is your name?' is the same question asked of Jacob
- Legion's comment that 'we are many' is identical to the words of Ez. 33:24 about Israel: "Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but *we are many*; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?".
- Legion had often been bound with fetters and chains (Mk 5:3,4)- just as God's people had so often been taken into captivity in "fetters and chains" (2 Chron. 33:11; 36:6, 2 Kings 24:7).
- When the sick man asks that the unclean spirits not be sent "out of the country" (Mk. 5:10), I take this as his resisting the healing. But he later repents and asks for them to be sent into the herd of pigs. This recalls a prophecy about the restoration of Judah in Zech. 13:2: "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land".
- The herd of pigs being "destroyed" in the water recalls the Egyptians being "destroyed" in the Red Sea when Israel were delivered from Gentile power before. The Gadarene Gentiles "were afraid", just as the Gentile world was at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 15:14). The curing of Legion is termed "great things" (Mk. 5:19); and Israel's exodus from Gentile power and the destruction of the Egyptians is likewise called "great things" (Ps. 106:21).

8:28 *And when he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said: What have I to do with you, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me-*

He was one of the few who joined the dots and saw that the Lord was God's Son; yet he feared condemnation, which is what "torment" spoke of. It was his mental illness which was largely responsible for that paranoia about condemnation; and the Lord healed him of it.

A comparison of the records indicates that the voice of the individual man is paralleled with that of the 'demons' (see on :2)- the man was called Legion, because he believed and spoke as if he were inhabited by hundreds of 'demons':

"Torment *me* not" (Mk. 5:7) = "Are you come to torment *us*?" (Mt. 8:29). "He [singular] besought him" (Mk. 5:9) = "*the demons* besought him" (Mk. 5:12)

The man's own words explain his self-perception: "My name [singular] is Legion: for we are many (Mk. 5:9)". This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.

Another case of 'proving too much' arises from reflection upon the fact that the 'demon possessed' Legion clearly recognized Jesus as the Son of God (Mk. 5:7); Mark seems to emphasize that demon possessed' people perceived Jesus as God's Son (Mk. 1:24,34; 3:11). Yet Mark and the other Gospel writers likewise emphasize the slowness or refusal of many other groups in the Gospels to arrive at the same perception. And so we are forced to deal with the question: Since when do 'demons' bring people to accept Jesus as God's Son? Surely, according to the classical schema of understanding them, they and the Devil supposedly behind them are leading people to unbelief rather than to belief? But once we accept the language of 'demon possession' as referring to mental illness without requiring the actual physical existence of demons, then everything falls into place. For it's so often the case that the mentally ill have a very fine and accurate perception of spiritual things. And we see a clear pattern developed in the Gospels: the poor, the marginalized, women, slaves, the mentally ill ['demon possessed'], the disenfranchised, the lepers, the prostitutes, are the ones who perceive Jesus as God's Son and believe in Him.

The man's fear of condemnation ["torment"] was triggered or restimulated by the command to the 'unclean spirit' to come out of the man. Legion assumed that he personally was going to be condemned if the "unclean spirit" was condemned which he supposed was within him. But the Lord was seeking to help the man see a difference between himself personally, and his mental illness, the "spirit" or mind within him which was paranoid about condemnation. And so the Lord went along with

the man's self-perception, and in terms the man understood, showed beyond doubt that that spirit of fear had been cast out. Perhaps John reflects on this incident when he writes that perfect love casts out fear, because fear is associated with "torment" (1 Jn. 4:18), which is just what the man was obsessed with fearing (Mk. 5:7).

8:29 *For he was commanding the unclean spirit to come out from the man. For oftentimes it had seized him, and he was kept under guard and bound with chains and fetters; and breaking the chains apart, he was driven by the demon into the desert-* Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him; indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the demon into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness *by the spirit* (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

He had "often" been restrained, in efforts to cure him. He therefore needed some assurance that the cure from the Lord Jesus was going to be permanent, and the rushing of the pigs over the cliff to their permanent destruction would have been a reminder of that.

8:30 *And Jesus asked him: What is your name?-* The Lord focused the man's attention upon the man's beliefs about himself- by asking him "What is your name?", to which he replies "Legion! For we are many!". Thus the man was brought to realize on later reflection that the pig stampede was a miracle by the Lord, and a judgment against illegal keeping of unclean animals- rather than an action performed by the demons he thought inhabited him. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman came to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to

make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, God is accommodating the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

*And he said: Legion. For many demons had entered into him-* Legion could be seen as representative of Israel in their weakness. Mark records how Jesus asked the man his name- as if He wished the man to reflect upon who he thought he was. He replied: "Legion". And of course the word "legion" referred to a division of Roman soldiers, usually five or six thousand. The man felt possessed by Roman legions. Through the incident with the pigs, Jesus helped him understand that He alone had the power to rid the man, and all Israel, of the Roman legions. The observation has been made that the incidents of 'driving out demons' nearly all occur in "militarized zones", areas where the Roman army was highly visible and resented (Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) p. 115). The man wished the "demons" he imagined to be possessing him to be identified with the pigs. And Jesus empowered that desire. The 'band' of pigs is described using the same original word as used for a group of military cadets. And the pig was the mascot of Rome's Tenth Fretensis Legion which was stationed nearby; indeed, "pigs" were used as symbols for Romans in non-Roman literature of the time (Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001) p. 71; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000) pp. 212,213). William Harwood comes to the same conclusion: "Jerusalem had been occupied by the Roman Tenth Legion [X Fretensis], whose emblem was a pig. Mark's reference to about two thousand pigs, the size of the occupying Legion, combined with his blatant designation of the evil beings as Legion, left no doubt in Jewish minds that the pigs in the fable represented the army of occupation. Mark's fable in effect promised that the messiah, when he returned, would drive the Romans into the sea as he had earlier driven their four-legged surrogates" (William Harwood, *Mythology's Last Gods: Yahweh and Jesus* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1990) p. 48). The claim has been made by Joachim Jeremias that the Aramaic word for "soldiers" was in fact translated "Legion" (The same point is made in Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Earliest Palestinian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1978) pp. 101,102). Jesus elsewhere taught that through faith in Him, "this mountain" could be cast into the sea (Mt. 21:21; Mk. 11:23). Seeing that mountains are symbolic in Scripture of empires, it could be that He was referring to how the empire contemporary with Him as He spoke those words, the Roman empire, could be cast into the sea through faith in Him. The acted parable of the Legion of pigs running into the sea was surely teaching the same thing. In passing, I note the apparent discrepancy between the fact that a Roman Legion contained five or six thousand people and yet there were two thousand pigs drowned. I found the

comment on an internet forum, by an unbeliever, that "the governor of Judaea only had 2000 legionaries at his disposal". I have searched Josephus and other sources for confirmation of this, but can't find any. If it were to be found, it would be marvellous confirmation of the thesis I'm presenting here- that the pigs were to be understood as representative of the Roman Legions, who in their turn were responsible for the man's mental illness. In any case, there is evidence to believe that there were Roman troops stationed in Gadara, and the pigs were likely being kept in order to provide food for them (Michael Willett Newheart, *"My name is Legion": The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004) p. 14). "Pigs for the pigs" would've been the common quip about that herd of swine.

There is a strange flip of the tail in all this. Josephus records how the Romans massacred many Jewish rebels in Gadara, the very place of the Legion miracle, in AD69: "Vespasian sent Placidus with 500 horse and 3000 foot to pursue those who had fled from Gadara... Placidus, relying on his cavalry and emboldened by his previous success, pursued the Gadarenes, killing all whom he overtook, as far as the Jordan. Having driven the whole multitude up to the river, where they were blocked by the stream, which being swollen by the rain was unfordable, he drew up his troops in line opposite them. Necessity goaded them to battle, flight being impossible... Fifteen thousand perished by the enemy's hands, while the number of those who were driven to fling themselves into the Jordan was incalculable; about two thousand two hundred were captured..." (*Wars of the Jews*, Book 4, Chapter 7). This is all very similar to the picture of the [Roman] legions being driven into the water, as Jesus had implied would happen. Perhaps we are to understand that what was made potentially possible for the Jews by the work of Jesus was in fact turned around against them- they suffered the very punishment and judgment which was potentially prepared for Rome, because they refused their Messiah. This is possibly why the destruction of Rome / Babylon predicted in the Apocalypse is described in terms of Jerusalem's destruction in the Old Testament. The judgment intended for Babylon / Rome actually came upon Jerusalem and the Jews.

I suggest that the man's mental illness was related to the possession of his country by the Roman Legions. Perhaps he found huge power within himself to smash the chains with which he was restrained because he imagined them as symbolizing the Roman grip upon his soul and his country. In this case, his self-mutilation, gashing himself with stones (Mk. 5:5), would've been from a desire to kill the Legions within him, the 'demons' of Rome whom he perceived as having possessed him. He saw himself as representative of his people; Walter Wink sees the man's gashing himself with stones as a result of how he had "internalized [Judah's] captivity and the utter futility of resistance" (Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) Vol. 2 p. 46). So

often the mentally ill internalize their abusers; they act and speak as if their abusers are actually them, within them. This is why the abused so often end up abusing others; it's why Israel treat some Palestinians in a way strangely similar to how they were treated at the hands of the Nazis; and it's why Jesus urges us to pray for those who persecute us, to the end we might place a psychological distance between them and us, be ourselves, and not become like them. Jesus recognized this long before modern psychiatry did; hence he asks the sick man his name, "Legion". The man's reply really says it all- as if to say 'I am my abusers. I have internalized them'. Hence one commentator writes of how Legion "carries his persecutors inside him in the classic mode of the victim who internalizes his tormentors" (Robert G. Hammerton-Kelley, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994) p. 93).

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist who analysed the psychological damage done to those living under repressive regimes. Taking case studies from the French colonization of Martinique and Algeria, Fanon demonstrated that many darker skinned local people came to see themselves as second rate and dirty, and that when these darker skinned natives interacted with the white colonizers, they often experienced a tension between who they really were, and who they had to act as in secular life with the white masters. One of his books says it all in its title: *Black Skin, White Masks*. Having listed the various types of mental illness and multiple personality disorders which he attributed to French colonialism, Fanon concluded that there was brought about "this disintegrating of personality, this splitting and dissolution... in the organism of the colonized world" (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) p. 57. See too his *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967)). Similar observations have been made, in a white-on-white context, about the psychological damage done by the Soviet occupation to the ethnic Baltic population, perhaps explaining why the tiny countries of Latvia and Lithuania have some of the highest suicide and mental illness rates in the world. The point is, however exaggerated these studies may be in some areas, there is indeed huge psychological damage caused by occupying, colonial powers; and this was the case in first century Palestine, and I submit that Legion with his multiple personalities was an example of mental illness caused by such a scenario. Paul Hollenbach likewise interprets the case of Legion, commenting in that context that "mental illness can be seen as a socially acceptable form of oblique protest against, or escape from, oppressions... his very madness permitted him to do what he could not do as sane, namely express his total hostility to the Romans; he did this by identifying the Roman legions with demons. His possession was thus at once both the result of oppression and an expression of his resistance to it" (Paul Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 99 (1981) p. 575). Richard Horsley takes the idea further: "The demon

possession of the manically violent man among the Gerasenes can be understood as a combination of the effect of Roman imperial violence, a displaced protest against it" (Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) p. 145). By asking the sick man for his name, the Lord Jesus was surely seeking to help the man clarify the fact that his real issue was with Rome, and the man actually need not fear supposed 'demons'. This refocusing upon the real problem is a common feature of how the Bible deals with the whole subject of Satan and demons, as we've often seen in the course of this book. Horsley is right on target in his conclusion: "The casting out and naming of "Legion" is a demystification of demons and demon possession. It is now evident to Jesus' followers and to the hearers of Mark's story that the struggle is really against the rulers, the Romans" (*Ibid* p. 147). Newheart writes in very similar terms: "Jesus... demystified the demons, showing that the real culprit was Rome" (Newheart, *op cit* p. 84).

8:31 *And they begged him that he would not command them to depart into the abyss-* See on Acts 16:16. This is the man's fear of condemnation, noted on :28. Note that the sick man is paralleled with the demons. "*He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country*" (Mk. 5:10) parallels "he", the man, with "them", the demons. And the parallel record speaks as if it were the demons who did the begging: "*They begged him not to order them to go into the abyss*" (Lk. 8:31). This is significant in that the record doesn't suggest that demons were manipulating the man to speak and be mad; rather are they made parallel with the man himself. This indicates, on the level of linguistics at least, that the language of "demons" is being used as a synonym for the mentally ill man. There's another example of this, in Mark 3:11: "Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"". Who fell down on their knees and who shouted? The mentally disturbed people. But they are called "unclean spirits". James 2:19 likewise: "The demons believe and tremble". This is surely an allusion to the trembling of those *people* whom Jesus cured, and 'belief' is appropriate to persons not [supposed] eternally damned agents of Satan. Clearly James is putting "demons" for 'mentally disturbed people who believed and were cured'. And thus we can better understand why in Mk. 5:8 Jesus addresses Himself not to these supposed spirits; but to the man himself: "Jesus said to *him*, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit". He doesn't say to the *unclean spirit* "Come out of the man". Jesus addresses Himself to "the man". The demons / unclean spirits never actually say anything in the records; it's always the man himself who speaks. Josephus records that when the first century Rabbis cast out demons [as they supposed], they first had to ask for the name of the demon. The Lord Jesus doesn't do this; He asks the man for *his* personal name. The difference is instructive- the Lord wasn't speaking to demons, He was speaking to the mentally sick man, and going along with

the man's belief that he had demons within him. The 'demons' plead with Jesus not to torment them, and back this up by invoking God. 'They' believed in God and honoured Him to the point of believing He was the ultimate authenticator of oaths. 'They' hardly fit the classical idea that demons are anti-God and in conflict with Him. Clearly enough, when we read of demons and spirits in this passage we are not reading of the actual existence of 'demons' as they are classically understood, but simply of the mentally ill man himself.

8:32 *Now there was there a herd of many swine feeding on the mountain-* Mt. 8:30 "Now there was afar off from them a herd of many pigs feeding". The term is used about those 'far off' from Christ, the unsaved (Lk. 15:20; Acts 2:39; 22:21; Eph. 2:13,17). The man saw himself as far from Christ, with nothing in common between them (Mt. 8:29). His response was to say that OK, let's get the condemnation over and done with- and you yourselves shall be saved. See on :8 for the man's paranoia about condemnation, although he believed in the Lord as God's Son and worshipped Him as such. This is very much the kind of teaching which John's Gospel records as being specifically on the Lord's lips.

*And they begged him that he would give them leave to enter into them. And he gave them permission-* Mt. 8:31 adds: "And the demons begged him, saying: If you cast us out". The word is used about 'casting out' to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). Legion was obsessed with the thought of condemnation at the last day, being 'tormented' at the last day (Mt. 8:28), being 'far off' from Christ and His salvation (see on Mt. 8:30), 'going away' into condemnation (s.w. Mt. 25:46), plunged into the sea of condemnation (see on Mt. 8:32). He correctly perceived that meeting Jesus in this life was in effect a meeting of Him in judgment, for even then, even now, He is the judge of all. The Lord was assuring Legion that his fear of condemnation was well and truly 'cast out'; His destruction of the pigs was an acted parable of final condemnation at the last day; and this addressed the man's paranoia about condemnation noted on :8. John's Gospel doesn't record this incident but as so often, he records the essential teaching in spiritual terms. In John's terms, we need have no fear of future condemnation, for we have received it now, and have passed from judgment to life and salvation. Legion had a fine understanding of the Lord Jesus. He realized that meeting Him was meeting his judge. And he asked that the pigs bear his condemnation. And the Lord agrees- which meant that once Legion had as it were received his condemnation, he had passed from death into life.

8:33 *And the demons came out from the man, and entered into the swine, and the herd rushed down the hill into the lake and were drowned-* Why did the pigs run over the cliff, and why did the Lord Jesus agree to the man's request for this? Because mental illness features intermittent

episodes, it's understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the 'spirit' assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: "I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him" (Mk. 9:25). It's in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion's cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the curing of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God's Son (Mk. 5:6); indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus "from out of the city" (Lk. 8:27) and yet Mt. 8:28 speaks of him living in the tombs outside the city. He pleads with the Lord not to torment him (Mk. 5:7)- full of memories of how the local folk had tied him up and beaten him to try to exorcise the demons. Probably Legion's greatest fear was that he would relapse into madness again; that the cure which he believed Jesus could offer him might not be permanent. And so the Lord agreed to the man's request that the demons he perceived as within him should be permanently cast out; and the sight of the herd of pigs running over the cliff to permanent death below, with the awful sound this would've made, would have remained an abiding memory for the man. Note how the 'demon possessed' man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out (Mk. 1:23)- showing he was likewise afflicted by intermittent fits.

The madness may have been an infection in the brain of the trichina parasite, commonly found infecting the muscles of pigs - and transmissible to humans in undercooked pork. The infected man would likely have been forced by poverty to eat this kind of food, and likely associated his "problem" with it because of the prohibition of pork under the Mosaic Law. This approach is confirmed by medical observations such as the following:

"Neurocysticercosis is the most common parasitic disease in the world which affects the central nervous system... A 25 year old, illiterate married Hindu male... presented with a three month history of gradual change in behavior in the form of irrelevant talk ... On mental status examination, he was well oriented to time, place and person, cooperative, communicative and responded well to questions asked... Delusions of persecution and reference were present... he accepted the illness but

attributed the cause to evil spirits... histopathology report of subcutaneous nodule confirmed the diagnosis of cysticercosis cellulosae.... Significant improvement in psychiatric symptoms was also observed following albendazole (an anti-parasitic drug) therapy. Delusions of persecution and delusions of reference were not found on mental status examination. Insight also improved; instead of attributing the illness to evil spirits, the patient accepted having a physical illness." ("Neurocysticercosis Presenting as Schizophrenia: A Case Report", B. Bhatia, S. Mishra, A.S. Srivastava, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 1994, Vol. 36(4), pp. 187-189).

The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

Death in the sea was seen as condemnation; the same figure is used of Babylon's final condemnation. The Legion incident "proves too much" if we are to insist on reading it on a strictly literal level. Do demons drown? Presumably, no. And yet the story as it stands requires us to believe that demons drown- if we are talking about literal 'demons' here. Clearly, Legion was mentally ill. We therefore have to face the hard question: Was that mental illness caused by demons, or, as I am suggesting, is the language of demon possession merely being used to describe mental illness? If indeed mental illness is caused by demons, the observations of T.S. Huxley are about right: "The belief in demons and demoniacal possession is a mere survival of a once universal superstition, its persistence pretty much in the inverse ratio of the general instruction, intelligence, and sound judgment of the population among whom it prevails. Demonology gave rise through the special influence of Christian ecclesiastics, to the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women, and children... If the story is true, the medieval theory of the invisible world may be and probably is, quite correct; and the witchfinders, from Sprenger to Hopkins and Mather, are much-maligned men... For the question of the existence of demons and of possession by them, though it lies strictly within the province of science, is also of the deepest moral and religious significance. If physical and mental disorders are caused by demons, Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries rightly considered that relics and exorcists were more useful than doctors; the gravest questions arise as to the legal and

moral responsibilities of persons inspired by demoniacal impulses; and our whole conception of the universe and of our relations to it becomes totally different from what it would be on the contrary hypothesis" (T. S. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition* (New York: Appleton, 1899) p. 225).

8:34 *And when the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and reported it in the nearby town and in the countryside-* "What had happened" was the cure of Legion; they came to investigate, and saw the cured man. As Jews they were not supposed to be keeping pigs; they realized they could say little against the Lord's action, for what they had been doing was illegal. It would have taken some time for the news to spread to "the city and in the country"; so we can assume the Lord sat with the cured Legion for some time, even days, teaching him further.

8:35 *And they went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man, from whom the demons had left, sitting, clothed and in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus; and they were afraid-*

When Legion was cured of his 'demons', we read of him as now "clothed and in his right mind". His 'demon possession' therefore referred to a sick state of mind; and the 'casting out' of those demons to the healing of his mental state. People thought that Jesus was mad and said this must be because He had a demon- "He has a demon, and is mad" (Jn. 10:20; 7:19-20; 8:52). They therefore believed that demons caused madness.

The "fear" of the people was perhaps related to their bad conscience about keeping pigs. The parable of the prodigal son associated Jewish pig keepers with those who needed to repent, and for whom the Father was eagerly waiting to welcome back home. Those people were in the same position as Legion; being now aware of the Lord's Divine power, but fearing condemnation. They actually needed the same basic healing which the Lord had given Legion in curing him of his complex about condemnation. Indeed the case of Legion speaks to so many believers today, who believe in and even worship the Lord as Son of God, but who are obsessed with a fear of final condemnation.

8:36 *And they that saw it told them how he that was possessed with demons had been healed-* Apart from the loss of their pigs, what had happened was good news. Fear of condemnation, to the point of paranoia, really could be cured by the Lord Jesus; the demons of doubt and fear really could be cast out, and the miracle of the destruction of the pigs was dramatic visual evidence of this. But when faced with this, the people feared and didn't want that good news.

8:37 *And all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into a*

*boat and returned-* "Begged" is the very same word used about the demons / mentally ill men 'beseeching' Jesus in Mt. 8:31. As the mentally ill men besought Jesus to send away the demons, so the city dwellers besought Jesus to also 'go away'. As the keepers of the pigs "went their way" (Mt. 8:33), so the same word is used of the demons 'going away' into the pigs (Mt. 8:31,32). As the city dwellers 'came out' to meet Jesus, so the mentally ill men 'came out' of the tombs to meet Jesus (Mt. 8:28) and the demons 'came out' of them (Mt. 8:32). Perhaps the idea is that those unbelievers were spiritually in the same position as the despised mentally ill men whom they had excluded from their society. And the story ends with the mentally ill saved, and the townspeople asking Jesus to depart from them, which will be the exact position of the rejected at the last day (Mt. 25:41; Lk. 13:27). It is they who are condemned, by their own wish; the mentally ill men asked for the pigs to bear their condemnation, which they felt worthy of- and thus were saved.

Consider how the believers were assembled praying for Peter's release, and then when he turns up on the doorstep, they tell the servant girl that she's mad to think Peter was there. Or how the Lord Jesus did such wonderful miracles- and people asked him to go away. We too have this element within us. We would rather salvation and forgiveness were 'harder' to attain. The popularity of Catholic and Orthodox rituals is proof enough of this. It always touches me to read in the Gospels how the Lord Jesus cured wide eyed spastic children, crippled, wheezing young women, and sent them (and their loved ones) away with a joy and sparkle this world has never known. But the people asked Him to go away, and eventually did Him to death. A voice came from Heaven, validating Him as the Son of God; those who heard it involuntarily fell to the ground. But the people didn't really believe, and plotted to kill him (Jn. 12:37). They turned round and bayed for His blood, and nailed Him to death. He cured poor Legion; and the people told the Lord to go away.

8:38 *But the man from whom the demons had left pleaded with him that he might be with him; but he sent him away, saying-* Motivations for involvement in evangelistic work vary. This man was separated from his family and society, for he had been violent and abusive to them. It would have been far more convenient for him to just leave them and join the peripatetic ministry of the Lord Jesus. But the Lord realized that the healing of relationships was a fundamental outcome of acceptance of the Gospel; and He wished this process to at least be given a chance in this case. And so He established a principle which many have struggled to accept: ministry to family and local society is even more important than joining in mobile missionary work.

8:39 *Return to your family, and declare what great things God has done for you-* We must "do" the Lord's will (Mt. 7:21), but the Lord also 'does'

for us by His grace ("mercy"); our 'doing' is in response to His 'doing' for us. The same word is used in Jn. 4:1 (also Acts 15:17) of how the Lord 'did' or "made" disciples. That was the end point in view; the "great things" done were not just the cure, but the making of a disciple. Mary's praise that "He has done to me great things" is surely behind her Son's words in Lk. 8:39, where He bids a man go home "and shew how great things God has done unto you".

*And he went his way, publishing throughout the whole city how great were the things Jesus had done for him-* This public preaching in the city and all the Decapolis (Mark says) rather than to his family could be read as disobedience. The Gospels are transcripts of the twelve disciples' own preaching and obedience to the Lord's commission for them to go into all the world and tell the news of what they had seen and heard of Him. Yet there is a theme in the Gospels, consciously included by the writers and speakers, of men being disobedient to the preaching commission which the Lord gave them. When some were told to say nothing, they went and told many others (Mk. 7:36). And as Acts makes clear, the disciples themselves were disobedient, initially, to the commission to go tell the Gentiles the good news of their salvation. Legion's disobedience is especially instructive for us:

**Mk. 5:19**

Go to your *house*  
 unto your *friends* [relatives]  
*tell* them [Lk. 8:39 "*show* them"-  
 by personal demonstration to  
 individuals]  
 how great things  
 the *Lord* [*i.e. God*] has done for  
 you  
 and how he had mercy on you.

**Mk. 5:20**

He goes to the *ten cities* [Decapolis]  
 He goes to *strangers*  
 He "*publishes*"  
 how great things  
*Jesus* had done for him  
 [ignored]

The record of the commission given him and his obedience to it are clearly intended to be compared. The man went to strange cities, indeed he organized a whole preaching tour of ten cities- rather than going home and telling his immediate friends / family. And how true this is of us. It's so much easier to embark upon a campaign to strangers, to do 'mission work', to 'publish' the Gospel loudly, rather than *tell* and *show* it to our immediate personal contacts. And we notice too how he omits to tell others of the Lord's merciful grace to him personally. Rather does he speak only of the material, the literality of the healing. And he tells others

what Jesus had done for him, rather than take the Lord Jesus' invitation to perceive the bigger picture in all this- that this was the hand of God. One wonders whether the disciples were commenting upon their own sense of inadequacy in their initial personal witness. The Lord told the cured demoniac to go back to his friends (Mk. 5:19) and family (Lk. 8:39) and witness to them. Clearly enough, the man didn't have any friends- for he had a history of violence and lived alone, many having tried unsuccessfully to bind him due to the grievous harm he must have inflicted upon many. Yet the man went out and preached to the whole area (Mk. 5:20). Was this just rank disobedience to what His Saviour Lord had just told him? Perhaps, due to unrestrained enthusiasm. But more likely is that the man now considered the whole world around him to be his family and friends, and therefore he witnessed to them. His care for others in desiring to witness to them flowed quite naturally from his experience of conversion at the Lord's hands.

There are some things in Scripture which are recorded in such a way as to promote meditation, and therefore they will always be ambiguous in terms of the actual interpretation which is sustainable. We can't *always* say "This word means X, this phrase means Y, therefore this verse means interpretation Z; and if you don't agree with that, you don't really accept the Bible". Because it is possible to say that about the interpretation of basic doctrine doesn't mean that we can adopt this attitude to the interpretation of every Bible passage. The record of the crucifixion is a good example of this. Or consider how it is recorded that some of those healed by the Lord *didn't* afterwards do what He said: one preached to his whole city rather than to his family (Lk. 8:39); another didn't obey the Lord's plea to not tell anyone else (Mk. 1:45). How are we to read these responses? Rank disobedience? Misguided zeal? Zeal in doing over and above what they were asked? You may have your ideas, and it is right that we should meditate upon these things and discuss them. But I suggest that ultimately they are left 'hanging' for the very purpose of promoting meditation and personal application, rather than being statements which shout for an obvious interpretation.

8:40 *And when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him. For they were all waiting for him-* The apparent disobedience to the command to focus upon his family was still worked with by the Lord (see on :39). The testimony of this healed man must have been so powerful.

8:41 *And there came a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue-* The Orthodox Jewish opposition claimed that none of the rulers [i.e. rulers of the synagogues] had believed on Jesus (Jn. 7:48), and yet Jn. 12:42 notes that "Among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be

cast out of the synagogue". Jairus clearly was one such ruler, and yet he didn't confess Jesus for fear of consequence and disfellowship. Remember that Jairus had come to Jesus whilst He had been teaching John's disciples the need to totally accept His new wine and not compromise with Judaism and the Pharisees who were standing with them. But whilst He was teaching that, Jairus had been clamouring for Jesus to come and heal his daughter. He rather missed the essential spiritual point because he was distracted by his human need. The Lord's sermon on the mount taught that we are a city set on a hill which cannot be hid, and that if we seek to hide our light under a bucket, then we will lose the light altogether. The omission of Jairus' name in Matthew leads me to fear that perhaps Jairus drifted away from faith, although his great faith at this particular moment in time is recorded positively.

*And he fell down at Jesus' feet and begged him to come into his house-* The Greek *proskuneo* is not used (as some Trinitarians wrongly claim) exclusively of worship of God. It is used in the LXX, classical Greek and in the later New Testament for worship of men- e.g. Cornelius worshipped Peter (Acts 10:25), men will worship faithful Christians (Rev. 3:9), the beast is worshipped (Rev. 13:4).

Jairus begged the Lord to enter his house; this was seen as necessary for any healing. The contrast is with the Centurion who asked the Lord not to enter his home, but just to say the word.

8:42 *For he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age; and she was dying. But as he went, the crowds crushed him-* See on Lk. 15:31. The Lord's rush to heal her was interrupted by a woman, whom He addressed [unusually] as "daughter". She had been sick for 12 years. And she was healed because of her faith. To the unspiritual man, this would have been nothing but an irritating interruption, to be sworn about under the breath. But to the spiritual man, there was ample encouragement here for faith; for another beloved daughter lay sick, and she was 12 years old, and she likewise could be healed by faith... The Lord's question: "Who touched me?" was therefore also a rhetorical device to spur faith in Jairus and his family. Who? Another "daughter", 12 years afflicted... It is only by our spiritual laziness in not providing that freewill input, that desire to understand, that crying for the knowledge of God which is in His word (Prov. 2:3-5), that this marvellous equation will fail. What greater motivation could each of us want in inspiring us to a total commitment to the word, rising early and staying up late to find that knowledge of God to overcome the sin which we hate? If we can only continue to desire to make the effort, to bruise the flesh more through that glorious word of God, then this spiral of growth will catch us up with ever increasing speed.

8:43 *And a woman who had suffered from chronic bleeding for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood upon doctors and could not be healed by any-* Exactly how old the child was. Clearly the hand of providence had been at work in both these lives according to some defined sense of timing. She has spent her livelihood not just on trying to get better, but on attempting to get out of a state of permanent ritual uncleanness.

This is another similarity with Legion, who had suffered from many failed attempts to cure his conditions. Getting 'worse and worse' is the picture of all people outside of Christ, and specifically of the spiritual state of Israel at the time (Mt. 9:16; 12:45; 2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:20). The Mosaic system of Judaism could not "better" humanity (s.w. Jn. 6:63; Rom. 2:25; Gal. 5:2; Heb. 4:2; 13:9), just as she was not "bettered" (Mk. 5:26). Perhaps the implication is that the woman represented Israel, who like Asa had trusted in physicians rather than the Lord (2 Chron. 16:12). Job's 'friends' had many Judaist characteristics and reasoned in the same way as orthodox Judaism; and they were "physicians of no value" (Job 13:4). The woman was bankrupt and desperate. This was how all were under the Law; the only answer was to throw themselves upon the Lord Jesus.

8:44 *Came behind him-* The scene is being developed from Mt. 9:19, where the Lord and the disciples are following the rushing man; and now we 'see' the woman coming behind Jesus, as if she in this sense was also one of the disciples who followed behind Him.

*And touched the border of his garment; and immediately her bleeding stopped-* It was by the unclean touching the clean that she was cleansed; whereas in Mosaic ritual, the clean is always made unclean by touching the unclean. The Lord radically reversed all the fears of guilt by association.

Her example inspired the many others who later sought to do this in Mt. 14:36. It has been suggested that the hem of the garment referred to the blue band which was to be worn by Jews to remind them of their commitment to obedience to God. In this case she would have been seeking to associate herself with the righteousness of Christ and be healed / saved [the same Greek word is used] thereby. In essence, this is what faith and baptism into Christ is all about. But the simpler reading is that she thought that if she associated herself even with the Lord's periphery, she would thereby be saved / healed. Given Jewish phobia about blood and the fact that any touching her would have been ritually unclean, she surely disguised her condition. And yet she didn't consider that her uncleanness could make the Lord unclean. Her view of His righteousness was correct- it can be shared with us, but our uncleanness

cannot negate His purity. She was driven to this insight by her desperation, just as Job's desperation led him to understand doctrinal truths that were beyond his time and place.

The Lord allowed this interruption when the man was so earnest that the Lord would haste to his home. The Lord, and the hand of providence, wanted to teach the man that how long a person has been dead is no barrier to resurrection; his faith needed to be developed further. And it fits in with the apparent silence of the Lord, always to develop the intensity of our desire for Him and our focus upon Him. Jesus focused on the essential whilst still being human enough to be involved in the irrelevancies which cloud the lives of all other men. Just glancing through a few random chapters from the Gospels reveals this tremendous sense of focus which He had, and His refusal to be distracted by self-justification. In all of the following examples I suspect we would have become caught up with justifying ourselves and answering the distractions to the point that our initial aim was paralyzed.

<b>Focus</b>	<b>Distraction</b>	<b>Resumed Focus</b>
The sick woman touches His clothes, and He turns around to see her. He wants to talk to her.	The disciples tell Him that this is unreasonable, as a huge crowd is pressing on to Him	"He looked round about [again] to see her that had done this thing" (Mk. 5:30-32). He talks to her.
He says that the dead girl is only sleeping; for He wants to raise her.	"They laughed Him to scorn"	"But..." He put them all out of the house and raised her (Mk. 5:40,41).
He was moved with compassion for the crowds, and wants to feed them and teach them more.	The disciples tell Him to send the people away as it was getting late	He tells the disciples to feed them so that they can stay and hear more (Mk. 6:35-37)
Again He has compassion on the hunger of the crowd	The disciples mock His plan to feed them	He feeds them (Mk. 8:3-6)
He explains how He must die	Peter rebukes Him	He repeats His message, telling them that they too must follow the way of the

cross (Mk. 8:31-34)

8:45 *And Jesus said: Who is it that touched me?*- This was a rhetorical question, designed to give the woman the opportunity to come out for the Lord before all. The Lord knew; for the woman felt she was no hidden from His eyes. She apparently "denied" along with all the others present. But the Lord was pushing her as He pushes us- to not have some secret flirtation with Him which exists just within our own brain cells, but to come out for Him before men, to His glory.

*And when all denied, Peter and they that were with him said: Master, the crowds press upon you and crush you-* The gospels are transcripts of how the disciples spoke the gospel message. And yet they are shot through with the disciples' recognition of their own weakness, and thereby their message was the more appealing and convicting to their hearers. Here, they paint themselves as foolish and inappropriate; they record their mocking of the Lord in the same section in which they record the scolding of the Lord by unbelievers at the home of Jairus.

8:46 *But Jesus said: Someone did touch me. For I perceived power going out from me-* This gives an insight into the huge outflow of energy from the Lord when He healed people. As noted on Mk. 5:29, His healing of people was on account of His total identification with them; and each healing was a living out in essence of the cross even during His life. The Lord of course knew the woman had touched Him; but He didn't want her to just have a secret faith. He wanted her to 'come out'; and He engineers circumstance in our lives likewise, so that we have to become a city that is set on a hill.

8:47 *And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him, declared in the presence of all the people for what reason she touched him, and how she was healed immediately-* As noted on :45, the Lord purposefully pushed her towards making a public statement for Him. We are a city set on a hill and likewise "cannot be hid". We see another connection with Legion, who feared condemnation and yet also fell before the Lord in worship. The Lord knew her history; but "the truth" to be told forth is a personal confession of our hopeless spiritual history, and the Lord's saving by grace. Yet she had initially "denied" the Lord's activity for her (:45). Perhaps this is included, as are Peter's denials, as comfort for those who under persecution did deny their Lord. He was still open to fellowship with them.

8:48 *And he said to her: Daughter-* Perhaps the Lord was using the term in the Hebraic sense of 'descendant', seeing her as a daughter of Abraham because of her faith in Him.

*Your faith has made you whole. Go in peace-* The *faith* of the sick woman is commended by the Lord- when it was due to her *understanding* of the significance of the *hem* of the Lord's robe that she had touched Him. She had perceived the connection with the High Priest's hem; perhaps too she had added Job's comment about our touching but the hem of God's garment into the equation. And certainly she perceived that the sun of righteousness of Mal. 4 had healing in his hems / wings of his garment.

The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36). Hence the Lord told them to believe and stop wavering, so that she would be made whole, or "saved" (Lk. 8:50). This comes straight after the Lord's commendation of the woman with "an issue of blood": "Your faith has made you whole [or, saved]" (Lk. 8:48). It's as if the two healings are similar in their result- being made whole, or saved- and both required faith. But the woman's own personal faith which led to her healing is paralleled with the faith of the family of the girl who was resurrected.

8:49 *While he yet spoke, there came one from the house of the ruler of the synagogue, saying: Your daughter is dead. Do not trouble the Teacher-* We naturally ask: *who* was this "one" who came with this message? In the Gospels, it is often the disciples who term Jesus "the Master". The implication is that it was they who thought that Jesus wouldn't have the power to raise the dead, perhaps connecting with their own studied lack of faith in His resurrection later. This again contrasts with messengers from the house of the Centurion asking the Lord not to come, but just to say the word for the curing.

8:50 *But Jesus hearing it, responded: Fear not. Only believe, and she shall be made whole-* Do not fear *but* believe shows the power of fear- it is fear which stops faith, fear is the opposite of faith. If we know the love that casts out fear, then a whole new style of relationships becomes possible. In so many relationships there is a balance of power which is more realistically a balance of fear- a fear of losing, of being made to look small, a fighting back with self-affirmation against the fear of being subsumed by the other. Be it parents and kids, teachers and students, pastor and flock, so often both sides fear the other. Yet if we are truly affirmed in Christ, no longer seeking victory because we have found victory in Him, His victories become ours... then our whole positioning in relationships becomes so different. For example, our fear of rejection becomes less significant if we believe firmly in our acceptance in the eyes of the Lord, the only one whose judgment has ultimate value. If we can say with Paul that for us the judgment of others has very little value, because we only have one judge... then we will no longer worrying about acting in such a way as to impress others. No longer will it be so

important to not express our inner thoughts about people or situations for fear of not using the constant 'nicespeak' which results in judgment from others unless it's used. There will be a congruence between what we feel and think within us, and what we actually show. And thus we will avoid the dysfunction which is so apparent in so many, as they forever struggle to control their outward expressions, hiding their real self, with the real self and the external self struggling against each other in a painful disease.

*8:51 And when he came to the house, he did not permit anyone to enter with him-* We see here the Lord's amazing force of personality when He wished to use it, just as He walked through the crowd in Nazareth who wished to throw Him off the cliff. He sent away the inquisitive crowd, just as He sent away the crowd after the miraculous feeding. He used the same power in commanding the mourners to leave the home.

The Greek phrase for "came into" is used so often in the Synoptics. Just in Matthew 9, Jesus came into His own city (9:1), came into the ruler's house (9:23) and came into a house (9:28). Consider the other usages of the phrase in Matthew alone: He came into Israel (Mt. 2:21), came into Nazareth (2:23), came into Capernaum (4:13), came into Peter's house (8:14), came into the land of the Gergesenes (8:28); came into a synagogue (12:9), came into a house (13:36), came into His own region (13:54), came into the land of Gennesaret (14:34), came into Magdala (15:39), came into Caesarea (16:13), came into Capernaum (17:24), came into the borders of Judea (19:1), came into Bethphage (21:1), came into the temple (21:23), came into Gethsemane (26:36), came into the place called Golgotha (27:33). Mark and Luke record even other cases of His 'coming into' various towns, areas and situations. It is a huge emphasis. John's Gospel uses the term, but frequently in the more abstract sense of the Lord Jesus 'coming into' the (Jewish) world. The prologue uses the Greek phrase three times alone in describing how Jesus 'came into' the world and into "His own" (Jn. 1:7,9,11). He was the light and prophet that "came into the world" (Jn. 3:19; 6:14). John's references to the Lord Jesus coming "into the world" (Jn. 12:46; 16:28; 18:37) are therefore not to be read as implying that He literally came down out of Heaven into the world; but rather they are John's more abstract equivalent of the Synoptics' direct and repeated statements that the Lord came into the Jewish world of His day, into human situations. His sending of us out "into" the world is therefore inviting us to go forth and enter into our world and its various situations just as He did. We are to replicate His ministry in our world and situations.

*Except Peter, John and James, and the father and mother of the girl-* Luke records how Peter, James, John and the parents of the dead girl entered the house where she was *alone*; and then "they" laughed Jesus to scorn

when He proclaimed she was merely asleep (Lk. 8:51,53). It's psychologically unlikely that the distraught, desperately hopeful parents would've ridiculed Jesus like this at that time. The reference is surely to the three disciples doing this. This is a profound recognition of the disciples' weakness- there, alone with Jesus and the distraught parents, they mocked Jesus' ability to resurrect the girl. And they have the profound humility to tell the world about that in their record of the Gospel.

8:52 *All were weeping and bewailing her, but he said: Weep not. For she is not dead but sleeps-* The Angel repeated the same words to the women at the Lord's grave, as did the Lord to Mary: "Why do you weep?" (Jn. 20:13,15). Surely those women were close to the Lord at this time. The Lord used the same word choice before and after His resurrection, showing the continuity of personality between how we are now in the flesh, and how we shall eternally be. Salvation is personal, and how we are now is of critical importance eternally.

8:53 *And they laughed at him with scorn, knowing that she was dead-* This is recorded in all three of the Synoptics (Mk. 5:40; Lk. 8:53). It made a deep impression upon them all. The Greek could suggest (although not necessarily) that there was a process of derision here which left the Lord looking somehow scorned ("to scorn"). Perhaps He blushed, or looked at the ground- for He was after all human. Clearly these people were just the hired mourners and flute players. There was an element of anger in their derision because clearly money and payment were at issue if they were to just be sent away.

8:54 *But he, taking her by the hand, called, saying: Little girl, arise-* The whole scene of putting mourners out of the house, taking her by the hand and raising her up was followed exactly by Peter in raising Tabitha. The Lord's style, language and even body language became the pattern for those who had been with Him, and it must be the same for us. The Gospels are written in such a way, that through the power of inspiration we can as it were be there with the disciples likewise watching Jesus and learning of His Spirit.

Mark adds that the Lord said: "Talitha cumi, which is, My child, I say to you, Get up" (Mk. 5:41). "Get up" there isn't from the '*anastasis*' group of words which are used about the 'rising up' of dead people in resurrection. It's *egeiro*, which more literally means 'to get up'. 'Honey, it's time to get up now' was what the Lord was saying- not 'I command you to resurrect'. He had raised her, given her life, and He knew that. In fact, He'd done it a while beforehand. For He told the mourners: "The girl isn't dead, she's only sleeping" (:24; Mk. 5:39). He raised her even before going into the room- and He knew that. And so when He finally saw her, He took her hand and gently asked her to get up out of bed. His gentleness, His faith, His calmness, His certainty that the Father heard Him- are all wondrous.

8:55 *And her spirit returned and she rose up immediately, and he commanded that something be given her to eat-* The way the Lord healed people reflects His sensitivity- He commanded food to be brought for a girl who had been dead and was therefore hungry.

8:56 *And her parents were amazed, but he ordered them to tell no one what had been done-* See on Lk. 9:44. The Lord Jesus, in His ministry, had forbidden the extroverts from publicly preaching about Him, as they naturally wanted to (e.g. Mk. 8:26). To keep silent was an act of the will for them, something against the grain. It is hard to find any other explanation for why He told Jairus not to tell anyone that He had raised his daughter- for it would have been obvious, surely. For they knew she had died (:53). By contrast, those who would naturally have preferred to stay quiet were told to go and preach (e.g. Mk. 5:19). Perhaps Paul was in this category. The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*...He said...let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected to tell nobody what was done, even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message.

## CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And he called the twelve together-* Implying they were not always with Him. But there seems an intended contrast between calling them to Him, and then sending them forth (:2). They were with Him when they were away from Him. It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us. And it explains the paradox of the parallel record in Mk. 3:14, whereby Jesus chose men that they should "be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach". As they went out to witness, they were with Him, just as He is with us in our witness, to the end of the world [both geographically and in time]. And this solves another Marcan paradox, in Mk. 4:10: "When He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked Him...". Was He alone, or not? Mark speaks as if when the Lord was away from the crowd and with His true followers, He was "alone"- for He counted them as one body with Him. This was why the Lord told Mary, when she so desperately wanted to be personally with Him, to go and preach to His brethren (Jn. 20:18), just as He had told some of those whom He had healed- for going and preaching Him was in effect being with Him.

*And gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases-* Every kind of sickness and disease was to be engaged with by them because they were to be the re-incarnation of Jesus' personal ministry, His body to the world. See on Mt. 9:35.

9:2 *And he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick-* The emphasis was upon preaching the Kingdom. The healings were secondary to that, and were to exemplify the things of the Kingdom. The noun for "heal" is found once, in Heb. 3:5, where in the context of describing the Lord Jesus He is called "a servant". The acts of healing were done in a servant-like way. This contrasts sharply with the pride associated with many Pentecostal healers. Whatever good we do others, dramatic or not so dramatic, is to be done as an incarnation of the supreme Servant of all, the Lord Jesus. For it is His ministry which we are performing, not ultimately our own.

9:3 *And he said to them: Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor wallet, nor bread, nor money. Neither have two coats-* Luke is picking out the picture of Israel as they were on Passover night, as an illustration of how His disciples should be on their preaching mission. His next words for them in :4 about staying until you move on appear to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on. It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His

law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, Jesus implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel. "Nor money"- Mt. "Nor brass for your purses"- Even small coins were not to be considered necessary for the missionary work to finally succeed.

*9:4 And into whatever house you enter, there stay and from there depart-* This appears to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on; see on :3. It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, the Lord implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel. In practice, this command was in order to develop relationships in families which would lead to the development of house churches, which was the Lord's preferred vision for His church, at least in the first century.

The Lord at least twice stressed to His disciples that they were not to go preaching from house to house, but rather focus upon one house in a village and make that the centre of their work (Lk. 9:4; 10:7). Clearly His intention was that they built up house groups rather than scattered converts. Perhaps this was alluded to by Paul when he criticized sisters who went spreading gossip "from house to house" (1 Tim. 5:13). He surely had house churches in mind.

*9:5 And as many as do not welcome you, when you depart from that city, shake off the dust from your feet for a testimony against them-* The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation by being finally "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

*9:6 And they departed and went throughout the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere-* They were obedient to the emphasis commanded them in :2; to preach firstly, and heal. The focus upon

villages rather than towns and big cities like Sepphoris is notable. We get the impression the Lord by all means sought to avoid controversy and conflict.

9:7 *Now Herod the tetrarch-* Literally, 'one of a fourth'; a reference to how after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, the kingdom was divided amongst four others.

*Heard of all that was done-* The Lord had recently used the same word in saying that unbelievers "By hearing shall hear and shall not understand" (Mt. 13:14). The connection may be to demonstrate that pagan Herod was no better than the unbelieving Jewish religious leaders. Even in the Old Testament, unbelieving Israel are often described in terms of the Gentile world. We can also note that the Gospels were designed for memorization, and such word plays are common in order to assist committing them to memory. The Gospels likewise should be the lifeblood of all serious Christian living and thinking in this age of electronic memory.

*And he was very worried, because of what was said by some, that John had risen from the dead-* The people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected (Mk. 6:14). Perhaps this was because they looked somehow similar, as cousins? The idea of bodily resurrection was around in the first century, but very often in the sense of a dead person not really dying but returning *redivivus* in another form. This was widely believed about Nero- and there are allusions to the legend of Nero *redivivus* in Revelation (they are deconstructed there as being untrue- the ultimate resurrection was of the Lord Jesus, not Nero). Herod's words show that a 'resurrected' person was expected to do great miracles as proof of their resurrection. The Lord's resurrection was likewise accompanied by "mighty works"- but not by Him personally, but by the community of believers. This accommodation to contemporary views of resurrection was therefore a way of demonstrating that the believers doing the miracles after the Lord's resurrection were being presented to society as Jesus *redivivus*; as if they truly were the body of Jesus revived. Which of course they were, and we are. Paul uses the same Greek word translated "show forth themselves" to describe how the Lord Jesus worked through both Peter and himself through the doing of miracles (Gal. 2:8; 3:5).

9:8 *And by some, that Elijah had appeared, and by others, that one of the old prophets had arisen-* As made explicit in Matthew 12 and 13, the crowds did not accept the essential message of John- but they fiercely defended him as a prophet, speaking God's word. Acceptance of an inspired word is one thing, but to grasp the essence of the Lord Jesus is quite another. By assuming the Lord was Elijah rather than Messiah, we see how they had missed the whole point of John's teaching; for he had been the Elijah prophet, heralding Messiah. And yet John had such popularity that Herod had been unable to murder him because of his mass

support (Mt. 14:5). The image of John was popular, John as religion; but his essential message went unheeded. And so it can be with us today; the image and religion of Christianity may be appealing to us to the point we identify with it. But the essential message of the Christ who should be at the core of it can be totally ignored or not even grasped.

*9:9 And Herod said: John I beheaded, but who is this, about whom I hear such things? And he sought to see him-* Mk. 6:16 says that therefore Herod concluded this was John resurrected. Having killed John, Herod's conscience was haunted by him, and he was eager to see John alive again. He regretted murdering him; his subconscious desire was that John would somehow overcome that death and revive. And so he became convinced of the idea that John had reincarnated as Jesus. This explains why people can be so utterly convinced of after death experiences, reincarnation, ghosts, appearances of the dead etc. Such apparent experiences are a reflection of their own deep subconscious desire to see the dead again, to make death somehow not death. This is where the clear Biblical definition of death as unconsciousness is so challenging.

*9:10 And the apostles, when they had returned, declared to him what things they had done. And he took them and withdrew to a city called Bethsaida-* The Lord wanted to follow up with them about their experiences whilst preaching, and to develop their skills further. He wanted to be alone with them on their return from the assignment. But He is apparently frustrated by the crowds turning up (:11); indeed, this happens several times in the Gospels. It is all a deep insight into the depth of His humanity, with things not working out always as planned.

*9:11 But the crowds knew it, and they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them of the kingdom of God, and those that had need of healing he cured-* Possibly implying that some posed as being sick, and yet the Lord could discern whose need was genuine. How hard His life must have been, in that hard land. And how hard it *is* for Him, in this hard world.

To not offend others we must "receive" them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, "He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:11). He didn't just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom. "He *received* them". Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord's body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

Mt. 13:54-58 records how the Lord taught in the synagogue but didn't get a good response, nor did He do many miracles there because of their unbelief. But now He leaves, and the people flock after Him. This may be understandable just in terms of basic psychology- when a wonderful offer is not taken up but appears to be receding, people then desperately grab onto it. Perhaps that's why the Lord seems well disposed to these people- healing and feeding them. But we also get the impression that the Lord was not constantly available for teaching and healing. I have previously remarked that the intensity of some of the days which the Gospels record was surely not repeated every day of His ministry. It seems He spent most of His time training the twelve and only occasionally made public appearances to teach and heal.

*9:12 And the day began to wear away; and the twelve came and said to him-* The implication is that they weren't standing by Him, but rather watching cynically from a distance. Which explains their harsh attitude to the crowds. After all, they too had been followers of John the Baptist, they too wanted to get away on their own to mourn the news of His death. They probably felt the Lord should've sent away the multitudes from the start. It's not hard to sense that the record paints the disciples negatively at this time. But who wrote this record? The Gospels are transcripts of how the disciples preached the Gospel. Despite the process of inspiration, the disciples in their recounting of the Gospel repeatedly mentioned their own weakness, and thereby would've come over as all the more credible to their audience. And in this we see a fine pattern for our own witness.

*Send the crowd away-* Twice they wanted to turn away those who wished to come to Jesus, and whom He wished to accept (Mt. 14:15; 15:23). As with the two miracles of bread, the second incident was giving them the opportunity to learn the lesson from the first incident- and yet they failed. Likewise they "forbad" John's disciples just as they wrongly "forbad" the little children to come to Him (Lk. 9:50). They ask the Lord to send the multitude away, whereas He had taught by word and example, that whoever came to Him He would not turn away (Jn. 6:37). Mark and Matthew present themselves, the disciples, as seriously out of step with their Lord at this time. And surely the communities which they were establishing were likewise tempted to 'send away' or deny fellowship to those whom the Lord would have them fellowship.

*That they may go into the villages and countryside and lodge and get provisions. For we are here in a deserted place-* Seeing most of the people were poor, and were likely subsistence farmers, it is most unlikely they had money to buy food. And 5000 men plus women and children would've meant a crowd of 10,000 at least- the few shops in those tiny hamlets would've been totally unable to provide for them. Here again we see the insensitivity of the disciples being related in the narrative which

they themselves told after the resurrection. The apparently redundant "buy *themselves*" (Mk.) may suggest the disciples' bitterness and resentment at the apparent expectation of the crowd that the Lord was to provide food for them. The only other time we meet the phrase is when the wise virgins tell the foolish to go and 'buy for themselves', and refuse to give their oil to them. Perhaps the Lord built that phrase into the parable because the disciples had earlier used it- and by His provision, He had effectively rebuked them for doing so.

9:13 *But he said to them: You give them something to eat-* According to Jn. 6:5, the Lord also asked: "From whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?". Even if money was no issue, the village shops simply had nowhere near the amount of food required. So in "You give them...", the stress was not only on the word "you". Perhaps it was more so on the word and concept of "give", standing as it does in contrast to the disciples' unrealistic and harsh expectation that these poor people go to a village and *buy* food. Surely the Lord had in mind Is. 55:1,2: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food". He intended the disciples to see the connection and to figure that He would even provide them with free food, because they were seeking His word. We are confirmed in this idea by the way that He appealed to the crowd in the same discourse: "Labour not for the food which perishes" (Jn. 6:27), which is surely an allusion to Is. 55:2. Perhaps the disciples got the point- perhaps not. Often the Lord sets us up with situations in which we are intended to have our minds sent back to a Biblical verse or precedent as encouragement and guidance for us in our decisions. Whether or not we grasp it is a matter partly of our familiarity with the text of Scripture, but more significantly, our openness to this kind of spiritual prompting, and the idea of God's word being part of a living, two-way dialogue between Him and ourselves.

The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them (Mk. 6:37). He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37). They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

When the Lord calmly bid them feed the huge crowd with just a few loaves ("How many loaves have you? Go and see" (Mk. 6:38)), we are left to imagine those men, almost paralysed and certainly gob smacked by the extent of the demand, awkwardly going away to count their few loaves. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.).

It makes a good exercise to re-read the Gospels looking out for cases of where the Lord urged the disciples to not look at Him as somehow separate from themselves, an automatic Saviour from sin and problems. Thus when it was apparent that the huge, hungry crowd needed feeding, the Lord asked the disciples where "we" could get food from to feed them (Jn. 6:5). In all the accounts of the miraculous feedings, we see the disciples assuming that Jesus would solve the situation- and they appear even irritated and offended when He implies that this is *our* joint problem, and *they* must tackle this seemingly impossible task with *their* faith. The mentality of the disciples at that time is that of so many Trinitarians- who assume that 'Jesus is the answer' in such a form that they are exempt from seeing His humanity as a challenge for them to live likewise.

The disciples, in John's record, complain: "From whence shall we find bread in the wilderness?". The record of the disciples' murmuring in John 6 reflects how influenced they were by the Jews around them. "The Jews then murmured at him", and the Lord rebukes them: "Murmur not among yourselves". But then we read of how "Jesus knew in himself that his disciples were murmuring" (Jn. 6:40,43,61). And again, remember that these gospel records were written by the repentant disciples, and they were using the example of their own weakness in order to appeal to others. The disciples appeared to share Judaism's idea that Moses never sinned. When the Lord challenges them to find food for the crowd in the desert, they quote Moses' hasty words: "Whence shall I have flesh to give unto all this people?"; and note Moses almost mocks God by saying that all the fish of the sea wouldn't be enough to feed the people (Num. 11:13,22). Faced with the same need for bread and fish, the disciples justified their lack of faith by quoting Moses, apparently unwilling to accept that Moses' words at that time were not of faith. The way everything worked out, they doubtless learnt that Moses, like them, was of imperfect faith and spirituality.

*And they said: We have no more than five loaves and two fishes, unless we go and buy food for all these people-*

Jn. 6:9 says that they said: "There is a lad here, which has five barley loaves and two small fishes". The boy out of the crowd gave the bread to the disciples- for now, the bread is no longer 'his', but belongs to 'the disciples'. Then they gave it to Jesus. He then gives it back to the disciples, and they give it back to the crowd, including to the boy. We see in this cycling around of the bread an eloquent picture of the Lord's humanity. What little the crowd of humanity had was taken by the Lord and transformed by Him into what could save them; and in this sense, the bread was 'sent down' from Heaven, in John's terms, even though it was a recycling of the peoples' own bread.

The very human perspective of the disciples is almost predictably brought out by their response to the Lord's question to them about where to get bread to feed the hungry crowd. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient" was Philip's response (Jn. 6:7). Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that '...and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!'. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of judgment: "The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. "not sufficient", Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom, right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them. He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. We too are given Divine nudges towards seeing Biblical precedents for our situations;

but we may not always grasp them. Familiarity with the Bible text through regular re-reading is a great help here. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?". They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

If a labourer worked for a denarius a day during harvest season, we can conclude that their figure of 200 denarii was a year's wages for a working man. Like us so often, they focused on the size of the problem rather than on the Lord's ability to move absolutely any mountain.

9:14 *For they were about five thousand men*- It is tempting to try to work out some significance in the figures here and in the feeding of the 4000 recorded later. Five loaves and two fishes fed 5000 with 12 baskets taken up; seven loaves and a few fishes fed 4000 with seven baskets taken up. With the food distributed each time by 12 disciples. One observation would be that the total number of loaves used was 12, which was the number of loaves required for the showbread (Lev. 24:5). The loaves in totality represent the Lord Jesus, the bread of God's presence in Israel, offered to all and sundry- not just to the priests. The Lord had made the same point in reminding Israel that David and his men had eaten the showbread- the things considered exclusively for the religious elite were now open to all, women and kids and Gentiles included. The very same Greek phrase "about five thousand men" occurs in Acts 4:4, to describe the total number of converts made by the disciples in the very early days of the church. Surely there must be some connection here. As the disciples moved amongst the crowds, each of them repeatedly breaking the bread of Christ to the multitudes, they were being trained towards the day when they would move amongst other multitudes preaching Christ and baptizing people into Him. It would seem that there were two major incidents when the disciples preached and performed mass baptisms; the 3000 in Acts 2:41, and then either 2000 or 5000 (depending how one reads the Greek) in Acts 4:4. These days of mass baptisms were probably never repeated in the history of the early church; and so the two feeding miracles were to prepare them for those two later incidents. In our yearning to attach meaning to event, we too can be encouraged that what we currently cannot understand is likely preparation for some potential future calling for us at some point in the future.

*And he said to his disciples: Make them sit down in groups, about fifty in each*- "In groups" is a technical term for how in the Roman empire, large groups sat at groups of three tables forming three sides of a square, with divans or couches on which they reclined as they ate. The open end of the square was entered by the servants who waited on the guests. But there no tables nor couches. They were bidden imagine them. For this was set

up as a banquet; with the Lord as host. It was a foretaste of the Messianic banquet. And all and any present were invited to recline and eat. So the people sat down as it were in table-companies but without tables, in companies of a hundred and others of fifty (Mk.), waited upon by the disciples. Who you ate with had religious meaning in their society; it was a sign of religious fellowship. And here the Lord opened His table to any who wished to hear His word, be they clean, unclean, Jew, Gentile, women or children.

9:15 *And they did so, and made them all sit down-* Vine comments: "Lit., like beds in a garden. The former adverb, by companies, describes the arrangement; this the color. The red, blue, and yellow clothing of the poorest orientals makes an Eastern crowd full of color; a fact which would appeal to Peter's eye, suggesting the appearance of flower-beds in a garden". If this were the case, then the allusion would be to the encampment of Israel in Num. 24:6: "As valleys they are spread forth, as gardens by the riverside, as aloes which Yahweh has planted, as cedar trees beside the waters". Equally if the allusion is instead to military groups or companies, the idea is that this apparently random group of peasants, with all their shady biographies and legal uncleanness and lack of understanding, were the new Israel the Lord was forming; the new "hosts" of Yahweh of Hosts.

The 'making' to sit down could suggest nervousness within the crowd as to whatever was being done with them. The wonder of being provided for at the Lord's table is indeed hard to grasp.

9:16 *And he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven-* This detail not only suggests the close fellowship enjoyed between the Father and Son, to the extent that the Lord could pray with open eyes looking up to Heaven, knowing there was no barrier between Him and God. But we also as it were have the camera zoomed in upon the Lord, yet another indication that we have in the Gospels an eye witness account. Likewise the Lord's way of looking up was noticed in Lk. 19:5; 21:1. And the Comforter passages promise us that we can share His relationship with the Father, through the gift of the Spirit.

*He blessed them and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd-* The aorist followed by the imperfect in "broke and gave" suggests He broke the bread once, and went on giving it out as a continuous act. This speaks of the Lord's one time death, and His continuous giving out of that to His people. The miracle of multiplication therefore happened at the moment of breaking the bread and His giving it out. This is indeed the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Clearly the record is structured to show how the Lord worked through them. In giving the bread of life to the world, the Lord usually works through some kind of human mechanism rather than as it were

parachuting His word and salvation directly to a person. There was no word from the Lord that He had performed the miracle of multiplication- the disciples had to go forth in faith and start distributing the bread and fish. Presumably He broke the five loaves into 12 parts, and the two fish likewise. The disciples, each holding a small piece of bread and fish in their hands, in turn went to the crowds and broke it further- and never ran out. It was indeed a sign of their faith that they participated, risking looking foolish as they first began. This is indeed an accurate picture of our fears as we go out into this world with the Lord's salvation.

Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers.

9:17 *And they ate and were all filled-* "All" ate; and eating together at a banquet was a sign of religious fellowship. There were for sure some there who were Gentiles, unclean, or simply curious. They were "filled", perhaps alluding to Dt. 8:10, "you shall eat and be full". The blessings of an obedient Israel were counted to this random crowd. By grace. They were "filled" superabundantly. The Lord's generosity is wonderful.

*And there was taken up of the leftovers twelve baskets-* Eph. 1:8 talks of how God has lavished or abounded His grace upon us. The same word is used about the Lord not only made miraculous loaves and fishes, but there was so much that abounded ("leftovers") that it filled twelve baskets, another implication that here were assembled the new Israel. The word for "baskets" here is a different word to that used in the feeding of the 4000 in Mt. 15:37. This here is the smaller basket, used for carrying ritually clean food when in Gentile areas. The Lord imparted a sense of ritual holiness to the otherwise random and unclean.

Why did the Lord do that, and why make the disciples pick up all those crumbs? Surely to give them an object lesson in how God delights in abounding to us. He didn't just give the people food; He abounded to them. The record of each of the feeding miracles, in each of the Gospels, uses this word translated "remained" in commenting about the fragments that were left over- although the real meaning is 'to abound'. Each of the Gospel writers was therefore deeply impressed by the fact that the Lord not only provided food- but such an abundance. All this sets the background for Paul's use of the very same word to describe how God's grace has "abounded" to us in Christ (Rom. 3:7; 5:15; Eph. 1:8).

9:18 *And it came to pass, as he was praying alone, that his disciples joined him; and he asked them, saying- Erotao can mean to pray, to entreat, to ask for something- rather than to casually enquire about an opinion held. He asked the question seeking a positive answer; He was indirectly asking them to believe in Him as God's Son.*

*Who do the crowds say that I am?-* This was to pave the way for His more significant, personal question: Whom do *you* say I am? (:20). "Say" translates *lego* which more specifically means to speak rather than 'to believe' or 'to understand'. He wanted to know the words of men's' actual lips about Him- which again hints that the disciples were not with the Lord all the time. They were often with people when the Lord wasn't present. Psychologically, considering others' views of Christ helps us better understand where we personally stand regarding Him- indeed, this is true generally in terms of self-understanding. Hence the Lord firstly asks whom others thought Him to be, rather than simply asking the disciples whether they believed in Him as the Son of God.

9:19 *And they answering said: John the Baptist-*Literally, *the* John the Baptist. "Some..." is simply translating *ho*, the definite article. "The John the Baptist" would therefore appear to be the main opinion- after that, some thought Jesus was Elijah, others thought He was another of the prophets. There was a strong belief in dead people reappearing in the form of others, *redivivus*, a kind of reincarnation. This had been Herod's view of Jesus, that He was the resurrected John the Baptist. None of the opinions they list include the possibility that Jesus was Messiah. The disciples' answer is therefore a tacit recognition of the failure of John's ministry. He was known even at that early stage as "John the Baptist" because his baptism of so many people was what he was noted for. But that baptism, that recognition of sin, had not led people to accept Jesus as the Christ. It happens so often, that we can have a temporary conviction of sin, and even do something about it- but to fully come to Christ is a different question, and it seems that few go on to make that vital connection.

*But others Elijah-* John's crisis of faith in prison involved him thinking that perhaps he had only been the herald of Elijah, rather than Messiah- and that therefore perhaps Jesus was the Elijah prophet. And it seems some had accepted that view. This is the problem with crises of faith- others are affected by them and can easily share our opinion. In Jn. 6:14 we learn that after the miracle of feeding the 5000, the crowd thought that Jesus must be "that prophet which should come into the world". But by "that prophet" they likely referred to Elijah or a herald of Elijah- and not Messiah.

*And others, that one of the old prophets has risen-* Why so much misunderstanding? Perhaps because it demands far less faith to accept Jesus as a prophet, a holy man, than as being the unique Son of God,

Saviour and Messiah; it demands far less response in practice. Islam presents Jesus as a "prophet", the new age religions as a "top bloke". But to accept Him as He is demands not only more faith, but also far more response in practice.

We can note that in Mt. 12:23 the crowd asks: "Is not this the Son of David?". That was a Messianic title. But the answer given here shows that this suspicion that Jesus might be Messiah was just a passing thing. The miracles themselves did not persuade the crowds of the Lord's Messiahship. Pentecostals should take note of that- miracles do not necessarily produce faith.

The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account in Mt. 16:14-18. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be. So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

*9:20 And he said to them: But who do you say that I am? And Peter answering said: The Christ of God-* Why did He ask this? Surely, with His sensitivity and insight into people and society, He knew full well the various theories that first Century Palestine entertained about Him. It seems to me that He asked this question for the disciples' sake; He wanted them to reflect upon the wide range of wrong theories which there were concerning His identification. And this led on to His next question: "But who do you say that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God". Surely the Lord Jesus knew what they thought of Him, without needing to ask them. Philip and Nathanael had earlier revealed that they considered Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah and "the Son of God" (Jn. 1:45,49). So, why did the Lord ask this question? Again, it was surely to focus His

disciples upon the reality of the fact that despite all the various wrong theories, they actually knew the truth about Him. But the Lord then goes on to His essential point: "Tell no man that thing; saying, The Son of man must suffer many things...and be slain, and be raised...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me... For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" (Lk. 9:21-25). The Lord told the disciples to "Tell no man" by saying that "The Son of man must suffer...".

9:21 *And he ordered and commanded them to tell this to no one-* "Tell no man..." is almost hyperbole; surely He means 'For now, focus more on the fact of my forthcoming death and your response to it, than telling others. If you gain the whole world for me in your preaching but lose your own salvation, what are you advantaged?'. After His resurrection they were to tell others; as the great commission made plain. And there is a powerful message to us all here, especially to those who concern themselves with large amounts of preaching. We should not be so caught up in listing the errors of others that we fail to appreciate the huge personal import of the truth that we do surely know. Indeed, the Lord sought to focus His men upon the Truth they knew by asking them firstly to consider all the wrong theories about Him. He then went on to bring home to them the radical, transforming impact of that Truth if it is properly believed and acted upon. Luke seems to draw attention to this theme again in Lk. 10:20, where the disciples return from a successful preaching mission to be told to focus their elation instead upon the reality of their own personal salvation: "Rejoice not [i.e. not so much] that the spirits are subject unto you: but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven". We are not to turn a blind eye to others' misunderstandings; the tragedy of the errors of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism etc. should not pass us by. But neither are we to remain obsessed with them. We are to be led by such reflection to rejoice in the basic truth of Jesus which we have been blessed with.

9:22 *Saying: The Son of Man must-* The usage of *dei* ["must"] is so common in the Lord's discussion of His death.

*Suffer many things-* The phrase is used elsewhere of the sick woman who had "suffered many things" at the hands of "many physicians" (Mk. 5:26), and yet is used elsewhere about the Lord's 'many' sufferings at the hands of the Jewish leaders (also in Mk. 9:12). Surely the Lord perceived in her someone who was sharing something of His final sufferings. All our sufferings are likewise part of His crucifixion sufferings, and if we suffer with Him, we shall also therefore experience His resurrection. That woman was therefore set up as an example of us all.

*And be rejected-* The same word is used about the stone of Christ being "rejected" by themselves, the builders (Mt. 21:42). The word carries the sense of legally condemning. They rejected the sinless Son of God as a

condemned sinner and demanded His death. If nothing else we learn some basic psychology- that when a person touches the conscience of less spiritual people, they are likely to intensely slander the person and effectively demand their death, which in our day may be the social death of rejection.

*By the elders- Presbuteros* is specifically used of the Sanhedrin members. The Lord's predictions here are highly specific and detailed.

*And chief priests and scribes and be killed, and the third day be raised up-* Literally, 'High Priests'. There was only supposed to be one High Priest, but the position was so lucrative and argued over that there were a group called the 'High Priests'- so far had Judaism fallen away from basic Biblical teachings, despite their zeal to keep the details.

9:23 *And he said to all: If anyone would follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me-* See on Mt. 10:38. In the context of telling His followers to witness to Him, the Lord equates this with taking up their cross daily (Lk. 9:23,26). To not bear that cross is to deny the knowledge of Him before men. To live the crucifixion life is the essential witness. Every act of grace, every evident sign of self-control, every statement of forgiveness towards misunderstanding and unrepentant men... all this is showing something of the cross. And in this, painful and difficult as it is, demanding and driving-to-the-limit as it must be, lies the essence of our being the Lord's witnesses. To witness Christ is not to just painlessly distribute a few tracts. It is to live out the dying of the cross.

"Take up the cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him - He speaks of "the cross" rather than 'a cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between our taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. But our taking up of the cross is a response to the taking away / up of our sins.

We all know from experience that how we start each day is important. Indeed, how we start any enterprise is crucial- hence the need for a sound understanding of the basic Gospel before we're baptized. We so often meet the phrase "rose early in the morning" in the Hebrew Bible. Strong defines the Hebrew *shawkam* translated "rose early" as essentially meaning "to incline the shoulder to a burden... literally to load up on the back of man". In this we see an evident connection with the Lord's thought about taking up the cross *daily*, for that surely implies we are to take it up each morning (Lk. 9:23). Men and women had arisen each morning for 4000 years and inclined their shoulders to the burden of the day, loaded themselves with it onto their back. And the Lord now took

humanity further, in redefining that "load", that burden, as His cross. Practically, does this not mean that we are to reflect as we come to consciousness each morning that we are to load ourselves with His cross? This thought need not necessarily lead to an image of having to burden ourselves with an impossible, awful weight. For again in allusion to this idea of loading oneself up each morning, the Lord spoke of how His burden is *light*! Here perhaps is one of the finest paradoxes of the spiritual life- that His cross, the life of self-sacrifice and self-giving unto the very end, is indeed heavy and demanding... yet in another sense it is "light", far lighter than the burdens of legalism which Pharisaic religion bound [and binds] upon people.

9:24 *For whoever would save his life shall lose it, but whoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it-* Lk. 9:23,24 describes cross carrying as a rejection of saving *our* life, of making our present life as rich and fulfilled as possible; and instead concentrating on *giving up* our lives. William Barclay comments on this passage: "A man must spend his life, not hoard it... the Christian must realize that he is given life, not to keep it for himself, but to spend it for others; not to husband its flame, but to burn himself out for Christ and for men... the questions are not 'How much can I *get*?', but, 'How much can I *give*?'. Not 'What is the *safe* thing to do?', but 'What is the *right* thing to do?'"

9:25 *For what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit his life?*- This threat rung in Paul's mind (in 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8): If a man gains the world for Christ but does not take up the cross, or is ashamed of Christ's words and principles in this world, he will be *cast away*. Especially does Paul allude to these words in 1 Cor. 9:27: "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway". Paul recognized his temptation: to think that his zeal for preaching excused him from taking up the cross. In essence, we must all see our own likely temptations: to focus on one area of spirituality, with the hope that it will excuse us from the cross.

Jesus speaks of how a person can lose their place in the Kingdom as a person losing or forfeiting their own self; He was thereby teaching that a place in the Kingdom was possessing one's own real self (Lk. 9:25 RV). The Greek text in Mt. 16:25,26 and Lk. 9:25 can bear a re-translation and re-punctuation which quite alters the sense as found in the English translations. It shows the Lord emphasizing the evident and compelling logic of losing our lives for His sake: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For how much a man is profited if he shall gain the whole world (in the Kingdom) and lose his own soul (now, as I asked you to do, to lose your soul for me)!... for the Son of man shall come... and then he shall reward every man according to his works", i.e. the losing of our soul is through our everyday works. Lk. 9:25 makes the same point: 'How is a man

advantaged if he gain the whole world (the Kingdom) and lose himself (now)!: *or* - be cast away, be condemned at the judgment, because he tried to keep his soul, he didn't see the logic of all this!'. The point is, a man at the day of judgment will be willing to give up *everything*, even the whole world if he possesses it in order that he may find acceptance. But then it will be too late. *Now* is the time to resign all for the sake of that blessed acceptance.

9:26 *For whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his own glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels-* See on Rev. 19:10. If we are *now* ashamed of our Lord before men, we will be in the condemnation process (Lk. 9:26 cp. 1 Jn. 2:28).

See on Rom. 1:16. Being ashamed of the Lord's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Lk. 9:26 = 2 Tim. 1:8). The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father. There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred.

The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It doesn't mean that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there "ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves so weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarrassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry

Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering for years in the wilderness; but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

*9:27 But I tell you a truth: There are some that stand here, who shall in no way taste death, until they see the kingdom of God-* The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. "They see the Kingdom of God come" (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by "They see the Son of man coming" (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the 'coming' of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal 'coming' of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory.

Mk. 9:1 records that He also said: "The Kingdom of God come with power". It is of course argued by many that the Gospel writers are merely summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. After extensive comparison of the Gospel records, I find this explanation unnecessary- because in no case of apparent contradiction do I see that the different forms of words are mutually contradictory. The Lord could easily have said something like: 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)'. Luke's "Till they see the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:27) is perfectly in accordance with this- the first part of that clause ("Till they see") is from Matthew and "the Kingdom of God" is from Mark. It's statistically incredible that there is not a single case that I have come across in comparing the Gospels which is impossible to reconcile in this manner. If the Gospel writers were anything less than Divinely inspired, there would simply have to be contradiction between the accounts. I therefore see no need to assume that the writers were summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. This manner of repeating the same basic truth several times, e.g. 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)', is true to my human experience in

preaching the Gospel in public formats to illiterate people. I tend to repeat the same basic idea in slightly different words. And this is exactly what the Lord would've been doing, and the records of His words reflect that.

The preceding verse 26 has clearly used the language of Christ's coming and His Kingdom in the context of the final judgment, when payment will be made to those who have 'lost' in this life that they might gain eternally. It is of course no coincidence that the synoptics each go on to record the transfiguration. But the connection with verse 26 means that the Lord surely was referring to His actual return in glory and final judgment. The language of '*Some* here will not taste of death' is strange if the Lord has in mind an event which would occur within the next week. Surely He meant that that generation would see His coming in glory. The transfiguration was at best a vision or foretaste of that time, the evident "glory" involved with the situation is to be connected with the "glory" that will be revealed at the Lord's second coming (:26). I note under Mt. 17:1 that the Lord may not have been even expecting the transfiguration when He spoke these words. What are we to make of this?

One suggestion is that just as it had been possible for Israel to have been prepared by John to accept Jesus as Christ and thus enabled the King of glory to come to Zion and establish His Kingdom, so it was possible that the Kingdom of God could have been established in that generation. But Israel crucified the Son rather than giving Him the fruit of the vineyard, and even afterwards they did not repent *en masse*, and those who did failed to take the Gospel to the Gentile world to the extent which was then required for the Kingdom to come. "*Shall not* taste of death" uses the same word as in Mt. 10:23: "You *shall not* have gone over the cities of Israel [in preaching the Gospel] before the Son of Man be come". But it seems that the disciples did not fulfil the preaching commission as intended, for the Lord's parables of harvest lament the paucity and weakness of the labourers, to the extent that the implication is that the harvest was largely spoilt because of this.

Much hinges around how we understand *heos an*, translated "until". "Until" suggests that one state is ended after an event happens. Did the Lord mean 'You will not die until the Kingdom comes, and then you will die'?. That reflection alone suggests we need to think more carefully about the translation of those Greek words. Did the Lord really mean that they would not die until they saw the Kingdom come, and then they would? It could be that *heos an* is capable of a conditional meaning, as if to say 'Some of you will not taste of death *heos an* the coming of the Kingdom- i.e. you need not necessarily die, until the Kingdom come'. The problem with that is that every attested usage of *heos an* means 'until'; hyper examination of a common Greek term and trying to make it mean something else, or hoping such a meaning might be legitimate, is not the way to conduct Bible study.

Which leads me to my preferred suggestion- that the Lord indeed was saying that some of those present would indeed taste of death after they had seen His coming in glory. In this case, those referred to would be the rejected, those who had sought to gain the world for themselves in this life, rather than losing it all now in order to gain the future Kingdom at the day of His coming. The Lord often speaks of the awful position of the condemned in the last day. They will "see" Him- and *eido* refers more to understanding and recognition than to physical seeing- but all too late, for after that, they will then die the second death. According to Mt. 23:39, those who condemned Him to death would see Him again, and say "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord", they would accept Him as Messiah- but when? At His return, they as persons responsible to judgment will be resurrected and then in that day will wish to welcome Him as Messiah. But too late. This is the basis for the gnashing of teeth at the last day- seeing His coming and Kingdom, recognizing Him as Lord, but then having to die. Rev. 1:7 speaks of this situation- those who pierced Him will see Him at His coming in glory and bitterly weep. So the Lord is foreseeing how some would indeed be resurrected to judgment, see His Kingdom come- and then have to die "the second death".

However, it seems another meaning is also loaded within the words. John's Gospel speaks of how only those who are born again can "see the Kingdom of God... see life" (Jn. 3:3,36). Later, John records how the Lord spoke of how those who keep His word shall never "see death... never taste of death" (Jn. 8:51,52). The idea would then be that some of them would come to find spiritual life, and see the essence of the Kingdom in their lives- and the following account of the transfiguration would then be proof that this was indeed achieved in embryo by at least three of them. In this case we could also understand "the Kingdom" as a reference to the King of the Kingdom, the 'royal splendour' referring to Christ personally- and the disciples saw this in the transfiguration. The connections with John's Gospel are strong, but it would however seem strange for Matthew to start using language in such symbolic ways in the style of John. For this is generally not his style at all.

*9:28 And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, that he took with him Peter, John and James and went up into the mountain to pray-* Peter is mentioned first. An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to under-estimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia. The Acts

record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ's fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing... in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have preferred that. But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter's work as the manifestation of Christ, *the rock*, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter.

Being led up [Gk.] a high mountain by the leader to be present at a theophany is very much the language of Moses taking Joshua and earlier another trio of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) with him part way up Mount Sinai, and likewise experiencing a shining face (Ex. 34:29-35) and God's voice from a cloud (Ex. 34:5). Moses returned from the Mount with shining face and the people were afraid- just as happened here (Mk. 9:6). Perhaps Peter vaguely comprehended all this when he wanted to build 'tabernacles', because this was the task given to Moses for Israel to complete. Lk. 9:32 speaks of the *exodus* which the Lord was to make at Jerusalem- a reference to His death. It was the Passover lamb which died at the Exodus- the implication is that now God's people were free to leave Egypt. Again, those secular fishermen were being shown (through the obvious parallel) that they were none less than Joshua in this new Israel which was being created; and after the Lord's departure, they were to take His place and lead God's Israel into the Kingdom.

9:29 *And as he was praying*- The idea seems to be that just as He had taken the twelve into Gentile areas for a period of intense teaching of them, so even within the twelve He focused upon these three and wanted to spend time alone with them. He "took" them means to desire association with, to come close to. This was His intention, and one wonders whether the transfiguration was therefore unexpected for Him. Previously when He had tried to get the twelve away by themselves, there had been unexpected events which hampered that, such as the crowds following them, and even in Gentile areas the Lord seems to have been surprised by the faith and need to perform miracles which He encountered. In this case, it would be unintentional that the transfiguration is recorded as following straight after His words about His coming in His Kingdom; it wasn't as if the Lord said those words knowing that some would witness the transfiguration. According to Lk. 9:28, the Lord's intention was to go up the mountain "to pray", but whilst He prayed, the transfiguration occurred. See on Mt. 16:28. He started

praying and then there was a theophany; but in their human weakness they missed much of it because they fell asleep. This was exactly the situation in the Garden of Gethsemane, with the same three involved; it was as if He was seeking to train them for it. They were "heavy" with sleep (Lk. 9:32), and the word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels to describe how the same three were "heavy" with sleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:43; Mk. 14:40). Even if Jesus Himself wasn't consciously doing this, we have here an example of how the Divine hand leads us through experiences in order to prepare us for others which are to come later in similar form.

*The appearance of his face was altered-* Mt. "His face shone as the sun". The same word used about the shining associated with the Lord's second coming (Lk. 17:24). Having taught that we too should be transfigured (2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), Paul goes on to say that God has "shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is transfiguration language. We are to be transformed into that same image. He there becomes the picture of what each of us in Him are evolving into. The Lord's return will be as the rising of the sun (Mal. 4:2). The same figure is used for the Kingdom age and His return in Mt. 13:46 and Rev. 1:16.

*And his garment became white and dazzling-* The same description used about the white clothing of the Angels at the resurrection ("white as snow", Mt. 28:3, just as in Mk. 9:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12). In the midst of the conversation about His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31), there was the encouragement of what the resurrection glory would be like. The same word is also used about the Lord's current appearance in Heavenly glory with clothes "as white as snow" (Rev. 1:14- the very phrased used in Mk. 9:3). Indeed, the description of the risen Lord in Rev. 1 has many connections with the language used about His appearance at the transfiguration. Again the idea was to show Him how He would be after His glorification, to motivate Him to go through with the *exodus* at the cross which He must fulfil at Jerusalem.

Mark adds that the Lord's clothing was "white as snow, such that no fuller on earth can white them" (Mk. 9:3). The Hebrew mind would have obviously thought of the clothing of God Himself, the "ancient of days" of Dan. 7:9, which is described likewise. The comment that no *man* could ever make them so white is also a hint in that direction. He was clothed with the clothing of God. This doesn't make Him God, for Revelation has many descriptions of the faithful having the same kind of clothing. Against this background, the promise of Is. 1:18 becomes the more awesome- that even although our sins are red as crimson, yet they can become white as snow. This can only be achieved by the wearing of God's own clothing, the gift of His imputed righteousness, which Paul extensively glories in throughout Romans 1-8. Rev. 7:14 speaks of plunging our robes

in the blood of the lamb, and them becoming white. It's all so paradoxical- that this whiteness cannot be achieved by man, no fuller on earth could do this, but by plunging [surely an allusion to baptism] into the red blood of Christ. This is the challenge of faith- to believe that the promised whiteness can be achieved through Christ. It was possible even in Isaiah's time, on the basis that God looked ahead to the work of Christ which as it were enabled Him to do this. Therefore the reference to "no fuller on earth" suggests that there is a fuller in Heaven who can do this. And Mal. 3:2 is specific that the Messiah heralded by the Elijah prophet, John the Baptist, would be like "fuller's soap" in cleansing men through the judgment of their sins. David in the depth of his sin appealed to God to 'full' him ("wash me", but s.w. 'fuller'- Ps. 51:2,7); and this was done for him, on account of the future work of Christ which the Father then held in view. The Lord's glistening garments are therefore available for all of us. And it is with that connection that the scene there becomes no mere spectacle to behold in awe from afar, but a real picture of our own possibility before God.

9:30 *And talking with him were two men, who were Moses and Elijah-* They appeared "in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as the Lord did- this is clearly a vision of the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead, who opened the way to immortality. So there is no way that they were already glorified before His death and resurrection. It was a vision (Mt. 17:9), of the Kingdom. Just as Jesus was not then glorified Himself at that time, neither were they. They spoke of how the Lord was going to "fulfil" the *exodus* in His death at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). It was Moses who could supremely explain this to the Lord, having himself slain the Passover lamb and experienced the *exodus* made possible thereby.

The transfiguration follows straight on from the Lord's talk about the Kingdom. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom is fundamentally a *relationship* with God. Thus the foretaste of the Kingdom presented at the transfiguration was of faithful men in spiritual conversation with the glorified Lord Jesus, with His face shining as the sun as it will in the Kingdom, as the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

9:31 *Who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem-* See on 2 Pet. 1:15. "In glory" suggests they were presented as it were already in the Kingdom, and from that kingdom perspective they talked with the Lord about His upcoming short term sufferings. We too must try to see our sharings in the cross as being in the context of the Kingdom. "Departure" is *eksodos*- Moses and Elijah had each experienced death at their *exodus*. And yet the Lord's *exodus* was all the more meaningful because it would enable the final delivery of God's people from the slavery of sin and death.

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9:32 *Now Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they were fully awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him-* "Saw his glory" is absolutely the language of Moses and the Old Testament heroes seeing Divine glory in theophanies, and like the disciples, hearing God's voice (Ex. 33:18 Heb. - "shew" is the same word translated 'to see'; Isaiah- Jn. 12:41; Ezekiel- Ez. 1:28). Yet again the Lord was seeking to show those secular men that they were called to work on the level of Moses and the prophets in the new Israel which the Lord Jesus was creating out of manual labourers, prostitutes, tax collectors, swindlers and sinners.

The disciples' eyes were heavy in Gethsemane and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

9:33 *And it came to pass, as they were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus: Master, it is good for us to be here! Let us make three booths, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah-* Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. It could be argued that his desire to build tents and remain in the mountain of transfiguration was rooted in this- Moses and Elijah had just spoken with the Lord Jesus about the path He must take to death, and Peter somehow wants the Lord to stay there in the mountain (Mk. 9:5). And yet Peter's later preaching has so much to say about the Lord's death. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself

had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

It may have taken much of the day to climb the mountain, and Peter was maybe thinking of where they were going to sleep for the night. Or was did he also have in mind a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles at that time? Later, Peter came to see his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration. Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, neither for his Lord nor for himself. But by the time he wrote 2 Peter, he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down. The vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). Peter learnt this lesson from the transfiguration because he describes his coming death as his *exodus* (2 Pet. 1:15), just as Moses and Elijah had spoken then of the Lord's coming death (Lk. 9:31).

*Not knowing what he said-* It is possible to understand Peter's suggestion simply as the kind of inappropriate thing a man would say who wants to make a response to spirituality, but doesn't know how to. He wanted to do something material and physical- he simply didn't know what to say. The response was the voice from Heaven telling Peter to *hear* Jesus, to respond to His word, rather than run around doing inappropriate works just because we feel we have to *do* something.

*9:34 And while he said these things, there came a cloud that overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered into the cloud-* Moses had previously entered the cloud of glory, seen God's glory and heard God's voice- on the top of a mountain. Moses' ascent into the mountain and into the very cloud of Divine glory was understood in Judaism as the very zenith of human spiritual achievement of all time, coming so close to the very personal presence of God, never to be repeated amongst men. And now, three fishermen were having the very same experience. No wonder they feared as they themselves entered into that cloud.

*9:35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying: This is My Son, My chosen. Hear him-* This was literally the word of God, and yet it was actually a string of three quotations from God's word in the Old

Testament: "You are My Son" (Ps. 2:7), "In whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1), "Hear Him" (Dt. 18:15). It must have been a profound evidence of the Bible's Divine inspiration. The very voice of God repeating His own words as found in the Law, Psalms and Prophets- the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures. "Hear Him" was intended to take the mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

9:36 *And when the voice came, Jesus was found alone-* He was the word made flesh. The law and the prophets were fulfilled in Him, and so the voice of God as it were made Elijah and Moses to exit. Matthew says: "No one, save Jesus only". In the Greek as well as in translation, this is really labouring the point. The "save / only", *monos*, is redundant- they saw 'nobody except Jesus' is a statement which needs no further qualification, indeed grammatically it almost cannot be given further qualification, and reads awkwardly because of the *monos*, "only", that is added. But the word "only" is added to emphasize that their focus was solely upon Him. That was the purpose of the event, and it had been achieved. Christ centeredness is the ultimate, final and total issue of our experience of Him, the Law and the prophets. The transfiguration ends with this total focus *monos* upon Christ; this was the practical effect of the theophany. John's Gospel doesn't record the transfiguration, but as so often, it is indeed alluded to. For John's Gospel is full of references to seeing glory, to hearing the Son. It's as if John presents Jesus to us a constant theophany, not one that three of the best disciples go up a mountain to see for a short period, but one which is continually before each of us, and which according to Paul's allusions to it, draws us into its very process. For we too are transfigured as we like the disciples behold the Lord's transfiguration (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.).

*And they kept quiet and told no one in those days any of the things which they had seen-* "To no one" maybe connects with the fact that they saw "no man" except Jesus (Mk. 9:8); and so they are asked to tell the vision to "no man" until after the Lord's resurrection. It could be that the Lord wanted them to retain their focus upon Him by not telling others but instead meditating personally upon what they had seen. The vision had been of the Lord's resurrection glory- we noted above the similarities in language to the shining garments of the Angels at the resurrection scene. The Lord didn't want people to think that He had already attained that glory without the cross. Even though in prospect He had that glory, He was insistent that no impression be given that He could attain it without passing through the cross. This was particularly important for Peter to

appreciate, who several times entertained a hope that glory was possible for the Lord without the cross.

*9:37 And it came to pass, the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him-* This meeting with the crowd occurred the day after the transfiguration (Lk. 9:37)- presumably they slept up the mountain for the night. The transfiguration record is replete with references to the theophany on Sinai. Moses' return from the mount was to a faithless people of God, and the same is found here, in that the disciples had been unable to perform a healing which they had potentially been given the power to do.

Note how the three accounts dovetail so nicely: Jesus and the three with Him moved towards the crowd (Mt.), Jesus having noticed them from a distance (Mk.), and the crowd came towards them (Lk.). And as Jesus came (*erchomai*) towards the crowd, there came out of the crowd towards Him (*pros-erchomai*) the man who wanted a healing for his son (Mt.). Mark records that the people ran towards Jesus when they saw Him (Mk. 9:15- presumably His face was shining after the encounter, after the pattern of Moses), which explains why Luke says that the man had to 'cry out' from out of the crowd (Lk. 9:38- Gk. 'to holler', to get attention amidst the rush of all the others towards Jesus) and that Jesus firstly asked the Scribes what they were questioning His disciples about. We really can powerfully reconstruct the scene by putting the three different viewpoints together. Matthew focuses upon the man who came to Jesus wanting healing for his son. The best analogy is to cameramen. Matthew focuses close up upon one man; Mark is taking a broader view of the crowd as a whole, and therefore picks up the brief question to the Scribes first of all- they made no answer that is recorded, and the Lord's answer to whatever questions they were asking was given in the healing miracle. That there are no actual contradictions of fact or chronology is to me a profound internal evidence of an inspired record, with a common Divine hand behind all the authors. If these were three uninspired men writing their recollections some time after the event, or uninspired people writing down what had been passed down to them as originating with those men, then for sure there would be contradictions. Because misremembering of detail is just part of our human condition, and the supposed lengthy process of oral tradition would inevitably have meant there was further corruption and unclarity added. The lack of contradiction in the accounts and the way they complement each other so perfectly has to me the hallmark of the Divine. Even witnesses who agree together to lie in court and rehearse their stories many times over- still end up contradicting each other. But that is not the case with the Gospels.

Mark adds: "All the crowd, when they saw Him, were greatly amazed; and running to Him saluted Him" (Mk. 9:15). They ran up to Him- and He add Peter, James and John with Him. This sentence in Greek is intentionally

similar to the account of Acts 3:11, where again "All the people [cp. "all the crowd"] ran [s.w. "running to Him"] together unto them... greatly wondering [s.w. "greatly amazed"]. The response of the crowd to Peter and John in Acts 3:11 could not possibly have been contrived by them. Their experience at the return from the transfiguration was to prepare them for their own later witness, when without the physical presence of Jesus, they were Him to the world. And the same kind of carefully, sensitively planned education of us is ongoing now. Not only do situations occur and then repeat in essence later in our lives, but what we go through in this life will only have understood meaning in the Kingdom, when we shall put into eternal practice what we are learning now. But for now, there is an inevitable difficulty in attaching meaning to event, because we cannot foresee the billion situations in our eternities where we will put into practice what we are now learning.

*9:38 And a man from the crowd cried, saying: Teacher, I beg you to look upon my son; for he is my only child-* Having only one child was unusual; perhaps the mother had died.

*9:39 And a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out-* The spirit and the person are parallel here; the person's behaviour was understood to be that of the supposed spirit. They failed to examine the behaviour or symptoms of a person as just that, instead they sought to explain it with reference to their theories of spirits.

*It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth; and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him-* Matthew and Mark speak of gnashing teeth and jumping into fire and water. Descriptions of the rejected come to mind as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... Likewise hitting himself was a sign of self-hatred, believing he was guilty of the beatings which were associated with the idea of condemnation (Lk. 12:47,48). The child was obsessed with fear of condemnation, just as we noted Legion had been. His problem was therefore psychologically rooted, and the language of demons is simply the language of the day to describe his actions and their apparent cure. This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves. Being cast into fire or water (Mt.) were both figures of condemnation. The young man felt he was worthy of condemnation- hence conviction of the Lord's saving mercy would have been enough to cure him of the deep sense of unworthiness which he had.

9:40 *And I begged your disciples to cast it out-* He "besought" them, he begged them, to heal the child. According to Mark, when the father of the dumb child brought him to the disciples, he tells Jesus that "I brought unto thee my son", but the disciples couldn't cure him (Mk. 9:17 RV); he perceived Jesus as His followers, just as folk do today. The Lord had earlier given them power over "unclean spirits" (Mt. 10:8)- but still they couldn't heal him. The power given to them was therefore potential power, but it was no guarantee that they would actually do the works. Alternatively, we could conclude that that power was only given to them temporarily. Or, that there is a difference between the twelve, and the more general "disciples" / followers of Jesus. However it would have been strange indeed if the man had not brought his son to the group of the twelve in the hope of healing. And it is the disciples, presumably the twelve, who then come to the Lord and ask why they could not perform the cure (Mt. 17:19).

*But they could not-* They had no *dunamai* (possibility); Mk. 9:18 uses a different word- according to Mark, the man said that they "could not" using *ischuo* (more carrying the sense of physical power). The man therefore bewailed at least twice that the disciples couldn't help; and he asks the Lord Jesus to help "if You can" (Mk. 9:22- *dunamai*). They did have the possibility; but they lacked the faith to actualize it (Mt. 10:8; Lk. 10:19,20 "I give unto you power... over all the power of the enemy... the spirits are subject unto you"). We too have been given potentials which require faith to exploit, and our failures to do so leave people with the impression that the Lord Himself is limited- for, like the disciples, we are His representatives in this world, and people coming to us are effectively coming to Him.

9:41 *And Jesus answered and said: O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you?-* He describes them as [part of] a "faithless generation", again indicating how the disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work... shew yourself to the world". See on Jn. 7:33.

An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in this exasperated comment. Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation...?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament

words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this. It was the disciples who were faithless. In Matthew chapters 12 and 13, the Lord had drawn a clear difference between the disciples, and the unbelieving surrounding generation. It seems that He now despaired of whether that distinction was valid; He sees them, in the heat of that moment of bitter disappointment, as no better than the masses who did not believe. The "faithless" will be condemned (Lk. 12:46 "his portion with the unbelievers", s.w.), and this is the term used about the world generally (1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12); or as the Lord puts it, this "generation". And yet the Lord uses it here about the disciples and again in Jn. 20:27. The very phrase "perverse generation" is used by Paul about the unbelieving world (Phil. 2:15). To use this term about the disciples is therefore significant; the Lord really felt that His faith and hope that they were different from the Jewish world had been misplaced. After His encounter with Elijah and Moses, he doubtless expected more of God's people.

This fits in with a Biblical theme- of people being confronted with acute spiritual temptation immediately after a highly spiritual experience. And this is true to life- so often, merely hours after a highly intense spiritual experience [e.g. at a breaking of bread meeting] we find ourselves assailed by temptation and spiritual depression. It's not that we are encountered by a physical person called 'Satan' immediately after our spiritual 'high'; rather it is a feature of human nature that the closer we come to God, the stronger is the tidal backwash of *internal* temptation immediately afterwards. Consider some examples:

- Noah walks off the ark, a superb triumph of faith, into a cleansed and pristine world, with the rainbow arch of God's grace above him- and gets dead drunk (Gen. 9:21-24).
- Moses renounced greatness, stood up for God's people and then left Egypt by faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. 11:27); and yet ended up fleeing in fear from Pharaoh (Ex. 2:14,15).
- Moses returned from the awesome meeting with God on Sinai and gave in to a flash of anger, during which he smashed the tables of the covenant- a covenant which had also been made with him personally.
- Israel were ecstatic with joy and confidence in God as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea- but very soon afterwards they were giving in to temptation in the wilderness, accusing God of intending to kill them and being careless for them.
- Judas went from the spiritual height of being present at the first "breaking of bread" meeting with the Lord Jesus, just prior to His death, directly into temptation from "the Devil" and then went out into the

darkness of that night (Lk. 22:3).

- Soon after his spiritual triumph on Carmel, Elijah is to be found suicidal and bitter with God, and considering that the other faithful in Israel are in fact also apostate (1 Kings 19:4-11).
- Samson's life was full of giving in to spiritual temptation immediately after he had been empowered by God to do some great miracle.
- Immediately after having been saved by God's grace from a huge invasion (2 Sam. 11), David sins with Bathsheba and murders Uriah (2 Sam. 12).
- After the wonder of having a terminal illness delayed by 15 years in response to prayer, Hezekiah gives in to the temptation to be proud and selfish in the events of Is. 39.
- Soon after the wonder of the miracles of the loaves and fishes, the disciples hardened their heart to it and accused Jesus of not caring for them (Mk. 4:38; 6:52).
- Paul straight after his wonderful vision of "the third heaven" finds himself struggling with a "thorn in the flesh", a term I have elsewhere suggested may refer to a spiritual weakness or temptation (2 Cor. 12:7).
- After the wonder of baptism and the confirming voice from Heaven, Jesus was immediately assaulted by major temptation in the wilderness.

This is surely the most graphic and intense expression of frustration in the entire recorded history of the Lord Jesus. His frustration was with how His disciples were not living up to their potential, and how faithless they were. And we daily exhibit the same terribly disappointing characteristics. But *how long* may not necessarily be a cry of exasperation- although it could be that. There can also be the sense of 'Until when?', and the time in view was the Lord's death. John's Gospel records the Lord several times speaking of how His hour or time had not yet come, and how He agonized until it did. That end point was clearly the moment when He cried from the cross "It is finished".

*Bring your son here-* The man had brought [s.w. "bring"] his son to the disciples, they couldn't heal him, and so the Lord asks for the child to be brought to Him personally. And yet He had taught that in their witness, the disciples were Him to this world. Coming to them was coming to Him. But He despaired that in this case, there was now a difference between them and Him. They were unable to manifest Him as they should because of their lack of faith. And there are times when our status as 'brethren in Christ' likewise fails, and we fail to be Him to this world and He has to intervene and reveal Himself more directly to men.

*9:42 And as he was coming, the demon dashed him down and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father-* As noted above, the young man was obsessed with fear of condemnation. When he realized he was in the presence of the Lord, his condition therefore worsened considerably; he felt he really

had arrived at judgment day, and wanted to destroy himself. Again we note that the underlying problem with him was psychological and spiritual, rather than being literally attacked by a demon.

There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today – e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water- that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to describe how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17-20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'. It must be noted that the man had previously described the boy's condition as being due to how "A spirit seizes him... and it *departs* from him with great difficulty" (Lk. 9:39). The condition was intermittent (consistent with viewing the condition as epilepsy rather than actual, literal manipulation by a spirit or demon). Trying various remedies, probably including beating him, the condition 'departed'. The Lord's cure is described in the same terms, with the implication that it was total and permanent, rather than partial and temporary, as their 'healings' were. The Lord said that the 'spirit' would never again enter the boy (Mk. 9:25).

9:43 *And they were all astonished at the majesty of God. But while all were marvelling at all the things which he did, he said to his disciples- Momentary faith and devotion to the Lord is worth little. No matter how impressive it might appear to others at the time, it is our long run*

commitment to the Lord which matters. The Lord knew that these same people would be involved in His betrayal and death (:44); they who for the moment were marvelling at His miracle, correctly perceiving that it exemplified the majesty or rulership of God in His Kingdom.

*9:44 Let these words sink into your ears. For the Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men-* He said that He would be, in the future, delivered up (Lk. 9:44); but the parallel Mk. 9:31 records Him saying: "I *am* delivered up". And Lk. 24:7 says that at this time, He told them that He *must be* delivered up. It is possible that He said all three things in one sentence, such was His emphasis: "I must be delivered up, I will be delivered up, in fact I am now being delivered up". He saw the future experience of the cross as being fulfilled in His daily experience of life.

The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*...He said...let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected "to tell no man what was done" (Lk. 8:56), even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message. See on Jn. 8:28.

*9:45 But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it, and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying-* They were rebuked later for being so slow to understand. A refusal to understand has a psychological basis. They didn't want to understand the predictions of His death because it meant death with Him, in essence if not in practice. So they would rather it just were not true. In response, God "hid" the understanding from them. We are confirmed in whichever way we wish to go in.

The Lord's teaching about the cross was "hid from them" (Lk. 9:45), much to the Lord's distress. And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hid from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This is a picture of the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3).

*9:46 And there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest-* Straight after the Lord's descriptions of His death, so often there

are arose petty argument and jealousies. Just as happens with us, in the shadow of His cross which we meet to remember. His greatness there is to be so perceived that none of us will be at all interested in being "the greatest". The power of the cross is likewise lost on the hearts of many because of their obsession with petty argument. Perhaps the Lord's clear choice of Peter as the leader was unpopular with them because of his impetuous ways and lack of leadership finesse. Or maybe they meant (as AV) who was to be the greatest after their Lord had died.

9:47 *But when Jesus saw the reasoning of their heart, he took a little child and set him by his side-* The disciples are framed as doing exactly the opposite soon afterwards, when they forbade the little children [s.w.] to come to Jesus (19:13)- whereas the Lord actually invited them to Him. Again we note how the Gospel writers present the disciples as so often out of step with their Lord.

The Greek for "set" means to stand, not to sit- this is how it is usually translated. Mk. 9:35,36 says that the Lord *sat* but He *stood* the child in their midst. But *histemi*, often translated "set" in Mt. 18:2, has the strong connotation of standing up or setting someone up in a position. "The midst" suggests the disciples were in a closed circle, and the Lord stood the child within the circle. If you call an onlooking child into the midst of a group of unknown adults, they will typically not want to come. We see the powerful attraction of the Lord to children in that this child came, although likely with much nervousness, wanting to come to Jesus, but not into that closed circle of men- just as so many today. Almost certainly the child came to the Lord and He held the child close to Himself; for He goes on to urge the disciples to "receive" such little ones, implying they were reluctant to have the child amongst them. That closeness to the Lord was what was being set up as an example. The scene is portrayed graphically if we put the Gospel records together- the Lord *sat* with the men in a circle around Him, He calls the child to Him, stands him up "by Him" (*para* Him means close by Him, Lk. 9:47) and then 'takes' him, cuddling the child to Himself "in His arms" (Mk. 9:36)- whilst He is sitting down. The natural response of the child who had been stood would be to want to sit down, holding on to Jesus, and not to stand above those men with their attention focused upon him. This natural desire to come down, to humble self, is what is being memorialized by the Lord as the pattern for all who wish to enter His Kingdom. Perhaps we can imagine the scene even further- the child would've wanted to come to Jesus personally, but the circle of disciples with their apparent superiority and judgmentalism would've been off-putting. But still the child came, and the Lord in Luke's record urges the disciples to allow the child to join the circle and "receive" him. This scenario is seen so often in the body of Christ in our days. In the early church, there soon developed a problem about 'receiving' others, not least children, women and Gentiles- and the Gospel records through this incident show how seriously wrong the disciples were not to

do so. Luke's record goes on to record the incident with John's disciples where the Lord's disciples didn't want to "receive" them- implying they did not immediately grasp the teaching themselves.

*9:48 And said to them: Whoever shall receive this little child in my name receives me, and whoever shall receive me, receives Him that sent me. For he that is least among you all, the same is great-* To not offend others we must "receive" them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, "He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:11). He didn't just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom.

"He *received* them". Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord's body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

The disciples would've had to open their closed circle to allow the child to enter. As the child settled down in the arms of the Lord Jesus, he was effectively added to the circle of disciples. Children were counted as non-persons in first century society, along with women, serious sinners, the mentally ill and lepers. The Lord is powerfully teaching that our attitude to such persons is our attitude to Him and therefore to God (Mk., Lk.). The challenge comes down to many of us too, who come from closed table communities. The Lord foresaw that to form a tight circle around Him was the natural response of those who followed Him, but He is saying that unless we open that circle, we are in danger of actually not having received Him at all. Our not receiving of such persons is going to make them stumble ("offend them"), and this warrants eternal condemnation. The Lord had bidden the disciples 'humble themselves', and now they are given an opportunity to do so- by 'receiving' amongst themselves, as one of them, into their circle, a little child. Opening our circle and accepting amongst us those who do not share (at least, at this time) our level of faith, understanding or even culture- this is indeed a humbling experience. All that is in us cries out to keep them excluded, and to keep our circle tightly closed against them. But the argument for a closed circle, or a closed table, is ultimately one which originates in pride and a refusal to humble self.

The little child was to be identified with the Lord Jesus personally. To not receive the little ones is to not receive Jesus personally. The issue is of eternal importance, as the next verse emphasizes. We cannot simply go along with such rejections and refusal to receive others just because it is the policy of a church or fellowship to which we have belonged or grown

up in. Social death and rejection by our brethren is nothing compared to the painful rejection at the last day which the Lord speaks of.

Mark inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us' (Mk. 9:38-42). The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or forbade [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

*9:49 And John answered and said: Master, we saw one casting out demons in your name and we forbade him, because he follows not with us-* Luke inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us'. The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or

forbad [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52- see on Mt. 18:7 *Woe to the world*). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

9:50 *But Jesus said to him: Forbid not-* The preceding section has sternly warned against forbidding the little ones, and now we have a worked example. The little ones in view were John's disciples; although seeing "John did no miracle" we wonder whether the miracle claimed was legitimate. But the Lord is not only gentle, He seeks to accept even such misunderstanding and misguided ones. For He alludes without doubt to Num. 11:28,29: "Joshua... answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Are you envious for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them". He considered this misguided miracle worker in John's group as all the same one of God's new Israel. As noted earlier, the disciples tended to "forbid" those whom the Lord wished to accept. And that same tension is seen time and again with the way closed, denominational mindsets seek to exclude and "forbid" others who differ and are immature. But the allusion to Numbers 11 seems to be saying that all in whom the Spirit is working should be accepted; and the litmus test is whether they shall "speak evil of me". If they do not, then they are not against Him but for, despite their misunderstanding. An alternative reading however is "Shall not lightly speak evil of me" (as AV). In this case, the Lord is comforting His sceptical disciples that if such a person does is in fact against Him, then this is no light matter and will be dealt with by the Lord's judgment; but not by theirs. This incident is surely alluded to by Paul when he warns against some who claimed to possess the Spirit who 'call Jesus accursed' (1 Cor. 12:3). There were such, and it was their attitude to the Lord Jesus personally which proclaimed them against Him. What people think of Christ is the critical issue when it comes to deciding whether a person is for or against Him; and that is obvious really, but the natural tendency to "forbid" those who interpret differently to ourselves is strong.

*For he that is not against you is for you-* If a person is not against the Lord personally (Mk. 9:39), then he is not against "us", the body of Christ. And so even if that person will not mix with us, from God's wider point of view he is "for us", "on our part". Here on earth, sectors of the Lord's body are against each other. But from the Lord's perspective, those who are not against Him are on His part. But speaking evil of the Lord personally is parallel here with being against *us*. And here we have a worrying implication. Attitudes to those in Christ are attitudes to Him. To be "against" any of them is to be against Him.

And so the Lord's attitude to John's disciples is very telling. He saw those who "follow not us" as being "on our part", not losing their reward, as being the little ones who believed in Him; and He saw wisdom as being justified by *all* her children, be they His personal disciples or those of John (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 7:35). John's men had a wrong attitude to fellowship- they should have 'followed with' the disciples of Jesus; and it would seem their doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit was lacking, although not wrong (Acts 19:1-5). Indeed, they are called there "disciples", a term synonymous with all believers in Luke's writing. And the Lord too spoke in such an inclusive way towards them. No wonder His disciples had and have such difficulty grasping His inclusiveness and breadth of desire to fellowship and save.

*9:51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for him to be received up, that he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem-* The record alludes to the way Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem in judgment (2 Kings 12:17). The Lord's death was effectively Israel's judgment. He set His face to go to Jerusalem, and the final sacrifice which would be there. He hardened His face like a rock (Is. 50:7); and yet the wicked similarly harden their faces like a rock to go in the way of the flesh (Jer. 5:3). We are hardened in our path, one way or the other. Jeremiah had his face hardened in response to his own hardening of face (Jer. 1:17; 5:3), and the wicked in Israel likewise were hardened (Jer. 3:3; 4:30).

*9:52 And sent messengers before his face; and they went and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him-* The idea of messages sent before the face to prepare the way is absolutely the language used about John's preparation for the Lord. The context here (see on :49,50) is of the Lord seeking to accept the disciples of John. So in order to promote unity between His disciples and those of John, the Lord speaks of His preachers as if they too are preparing His way before His face.

*9:53 But they did not receive him, because his face was set for the journey to Jerusalem-* To be truly inclusive is hard. The Lord wanted to show His acceptance of the Samaritans, perhaps building on the converts made from the conversion of the woman at the well in Jn. 4. But the mere fact He was going up to Jerusalem at a feast time was enough for them to not receive Him; when He had just been teaching about His radical acceptance of all. For all His grace, they treated the Lord with a guilt by association mentality, quite oblivious that He was going to Jerusalem to die there for them, at the hands of the Jews whom they despised.

*9:54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said: Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?-* Time and again, the Lord responded to requests for *Him* to do something by reminding the requesters of *their*

responsibilities- e.g. 'Bring fire down on these guys! You have the Spirit, go on, do it, you surely can!' was responded to with a reminder that *you* don't appreciate what Spirit *you* have (Lk. 9:54,55). 'Send the people away... No, *you* feed them' (Lk. 9:12,13). 'Save us from this storm, Jesus, you miracle man!... Where is *your* faith?' (Lk. 8:24,25). Elijah is presented both here and in the Old Testament record as judgmental and lacking grace and love. He is presented as all head and no heart for people. He was used by God and had a heart for God himself, and the Spirit worked through him... but he was far from God in other ways and in need of rebuke.

9:55 *But he turned and rebuked them, saying: You know what kind of Spirit you have-* The incident in 2 Kings 1:10 of calling fire down from Heaven is specifically rebuked by the Lord Jesus as not being of *His* Spirit. And He rebukes His followers for assuming that their natural prejudice against others can be justified by an appeal to Elijah's example. The Lord's comment that He had not come to *destroy* men's lives but to *save* them (Lk. 9:56) must surely be connected with what He has just said: Whosoever will *save* his *life* shall *lose* [s.w. *destroy*] it and vice versa (Lk. 9:24,25). The three words *save, life, lose / destroy* are all the same. There is surely a connection of thought here. But what is the Lord saying through it? The disciples like Elijah would have had their prayers heard- the fire of destruction could have come. But the Lord says that they don't know the type of spirit they are of. His Spirit is one of saving and not destruction. Men *destroy themselves* by seeking to save themselves without Him. This is why the Lord could say that He Himself judged / condemned no man- each rejected man will have condemned himself. The same point is actually made within the Elijah story too. In 1 Kings 18:28 the prophets of Baal worshipped *after their manner-* a Hebrew word normally translated 296 times "judgment"; they judged / condemned themselves, rather than needing Elijah to do so. And the word translated "cut" essentially means to gather. They gathered themselves together to condemnation and poured out their own blood. "Knives and lancets" is a phrase normally translated "swords and spears". They lived out judgment upon themselves rather than Elijah needing to condemn them. Elijah like the disciples thought that he was the judge on God's behalf, and that he was justified in calling down fire, evocative as that was of the way God Himself judges sinners. But Jesus puts it all another way- our focus, if we have His spirit, should be on saving people by getting them to *destroy / lose* their own fleshly lives through following Him. Jn. 12:25,26 makes the same point- he who loves his life *loses / destroys* it, but he who picks up the cross and follows Jesus will *save* it. Our absolute focus must be on the salvation of others through helping them condemn / *destroy / lose* themselves for the Lord's sake; and we achieve this by following Jesus in the life of the cross, not by destroying others ourselves. The Lord came to *save* not *destroy*; to *save* the lost / *destroyed* (Lk. 6:9; 19:10- the same words are used; note how this theme is developed specifically by Luke).

But He did this through getting people to destroy their lives. And He begged- and begs- His followers to have His spirit / attitude in all this. And His point was that Elijah didn't have His Spirit. Note that God worked with Elijah- He heard his prayers. Elijah like the disciples had the Spirit, the power that God was willing to let them have; and yet the Spirit of Jesus is more than raw power. And so it could be said of us, that we so often know not what manner of spirit we are of. We may be correctly reflecting the judgment of God, we may have Biblical justification for the hard line we adopt; but this doesn't mean that we fully have the spirit of Christ. Yet as with Elijah, the fact our prayers are heard, that Scripture appears to back us, can make us blind to such major insufficiencies in our spirituality. We have a choice in how we respond to others' weakness; there are different levels of response. If thy brother sin against thee, the Lord said- we can ultimately take others with us and then treat him as a Gentile or tax collector. But He continues- if our brother sin against us, we should forgive to an unlimited extent. This is the higher level of response to your brother's weakness. Elijah and the disciples took the first of those options, as many of us do; but in doing so we so easily forget what manner of spirit we are of; for we are to be of the spirit of Christ, not Elijah. And His attitude / spirit was most definitely to save rather than to destroy, to share table fellowship rather than disassociate... See on Lk. 12:49-54.

9:56 *And they went to another village-* Rather than to the Samaritan village as originally planned. Clearly the Lord's original plan had to be changed because of obstacles to it created by the Samaritans allowing their prejudices to derail potential evangelism; and the Lord is like this so often. He set up great potentials, but allows others to destroy them. In this sense His purpose is open rather than predictive and prescriptive.

9:57 *And as they were going along the road, someone said to him: I will follow you wherever you go-* The question implies that it would only be possible to do this with the Lord's agreement. The Lord was on His way to Jerusalem and death on the cross; He knew that nobody could follow Him literally wherever He went. We note His gentleness; He doesn't say that, rather does He simply warn of the hardship of the way; and that His fate would be that of all who followed Him.

9:58 *And Jesus said to him: The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head-* When the Lord spoke of the Son of man having nowhere to lay His head, He surely had His mind upon how His dear mother had told Him that when He was born, there was no place to lay Him, and His dear head had to be laid in an animal's feeding trough.

The Lord used language which challenged people. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which

dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.). All three synoptics record how He summarily ordered His weary disciples to feed a crowd numbering thousands in a desert, when they had no food (Mt. 14:16; Mk. 6:37; Lk. 9:13). He criticizes the man who earnestly wished to follow Him, but first had to attend his father's funeral. "Let the dead bury their dead" (Mt. 8:22) was a shocking, even coarse figure to use- 'let the dead bodies drag one more dead body into their grave'. And then He went on to speak and show His matchless, endless love. He expressed Himself to the Jews in ways which were almost provocative (consider His Sabbath day miracles, and invitation to drink His blood). He intended to shake them. He seems to have used hyperbole in order to make the point concerning the high standard of commitment He expects. Thus He spoke of cutting off the limbs that offend. He told those who were interested in following Him that He had nowhere to lay His head (Lk. 9:58). That may have been true that night, but the ministering women surely saw to it that this was not the case with Him most nights.

*9:59 And he said to another: Follow me. But he said: Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father-* Following Christ, which is to carry His cross, is paralleled by Him with preaching His Kingdom (Lk. 9:59,60). To live out the essence of the cross, in daily self-control, unconditional kindness and forgiveness, patience with those who provoke us... this is the real witness (Lk. 9:23-26). If we don't preach, we aren't following Him. And if we do follow Him, it's axiomatic that we therefore preach Him. "From henceforth you shall catch men. And... they forsook all, and followed him" (Lk. 5:10,11) definitely parallels preaching with following the Lord. Following after Him is the way to be fishers of men (Mk. 1:17), and yet following Jesus is so often understood by Him as a call to carrying the cross. A focus on Him and the life of His cross leads to a catching of men for Him in a quite natural way.

The man was on the way to his father's funeral and yet the Lord expected him to immediately follow Him, and quit going to the funeral as he intended (Lk. 9:59). And He criticized the man for not doing this. Another who wanted to first "bid farewell" to his family was likewise criticized (Lk. 9:61). Even Elisha bid farewell to his family before following Elijah, and Elijah allowed him to do this (1 Kings 19:20)- but the Lord Jesus was more demanding. He described the disciples as a "perverse generation" because they didn't have enough faith to work a miracle (Lk. 9:41). His

demands and standards were and are very high; and we should never allow the extent of His grace to blind us to this fact, nor to assume that He is not serious about those demands.

The man who wanted to first attend his father's funeral was told that this wasn't good enough; although Abraham and Joseph did this. The man who wanted to go and say farewell to his family was told the same; although Elisha did this (Lk. 9:60,61). The Lord is surely saying that the commitment of such Old Testament giants was to be less than what He expected of those for whom He was to give His all. It isn't that He won't *save* a man who (in the parable) puts his father's funeral before the Lord's demands. But He expects the *ultimate* level of commitment from us. Likewise His Father had asked Abraham to offer his dearest: Isaac. This is the Father and Son with whom we have to do. His parables of Mt. 25 make the point that the rejected will be surprised at how hard He turns out to be: they didn't expect Him to judge sins of omission so seriously. Likewise the man who held on to his talent of the Truth seemed surprised when the Lord said that He expected more. The foolish virgins were likewise shocked to be told that actually they didn't know their Lord at all.

*9:60 But he said to him: Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but you go and publish the kingdom of God-* This would have been more shocking to first century ears than it is even to ours. For to bury his father was the most elemental duty of a Jewish son- "in Jewish custom it came before other fundamental religious responsibilities like reciting the Shema". And the urgency about the preacher was to elicit a like urgency in the response of their hearers.

The principle of Nazariteship (explained in Num. 6) encouraged the average Israelite, regardless of his tribe, to in some way aspire to the High Priesthood. He could grow his hair long to imitate the High Priestly mitre, and he could chose to have the same commands concerning defilement by the dead and eating vine-products apply to him, as applied to the High Priest. The Lord applied this to all His followers, when He told the man who wished to bury his father to *not* do so, but engage instead in His work (Lk. 9:59,60). This would have sent the Jewish mind back to Lev. 21:1-11, where the High Priest could not be distracted from his service even by the death of his father.

*9:61 And another also said: I will follow you Lord, but first permit me to bid farewell to them that are at my house-* The urgency of the call to preach is taught by the way that the Lord called men to go preaching at the most inconvenient times for them- such as when they were in the midst of casting a net into the sea to catch fish during their workaday lives, or whilst Matthew was counting coins at his tax table. The Lord even insisted that a man not fulfil his most basic Jewish duty to bury his father-

but rather go and preach the Gospel *immediately*. The poignancy of all this becomes the deeper when we realize that in first century Palestine, burial took place on the day of death. The son had just that day lost his father, and was willing to miss the traditional six days of mourning to go preach for the Lord. But no, the Lord wanted him to go *there and then, immediately*. No delay for anything was possible in the light of the knife-edge urgency of sharing Christ with others.

9:62 *But Jesus said to him: No one, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God-* It is amazing that with the clear command echoing in his ears, "neither stay in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed" (Gen. 19:17), Lot could ask leave to live in Zoar, a small city of the plain, and not go to the mountain. He clearly failed to appreciate the reality and seriousness of the Angel's coming- and this will certainly be a temptation to us in that moment when the typology of Lot is fulfilled in us. The only way to guard against this is by consciously living our lives now in awareness of the fact that now we have been called to leave the world and its ways, and therefore our whole life now should have the spirit which we will have when we leave this world when the Angel comes. This is confirmed by an oblique allusion which our Lord makes here to this Angelic command "Look not behind you", when He says that any who like Lot's wife "look back" are not "fit for the Kingdom of God". The context shows that starting to plough represents the start of our new life in response to the Gospel call- but the allusion to the Angel's words to Lot show that we should live our whole lives in response to that call as if we are on the way to the judgment, having been called away by the Angel.

The Lord spoke of following Him as being like a man ploughing by keeping his eye constantly and unswervingly on an end point- and that point is Him as a person. The account of Peter starting to drown exemplifies all this- when he took his gaze off the Lord personally, in order to notice how the wind was so strongly blowing some object [perhaps back on the boat], then his walk to Jesus started to come to an end (Mt. 14:30).

All the Gospels present the crucifixion and resurrection as the climax of their presentation of the Gospel. Luke's record is studded with references to the Lord's progress on that final journey up to Jerusalem; events took place "as they went in the way" (Lk. 9:57-62), as if they were incidental to the main aim of the record, which was to describe the final coming of the Lord to Jerusalem and death (Lk. 13:22).

## CHAPTER 10

10:1 *Now after these things the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two by two ahead of him into every city and place, where he was about to go-* According to some texts, Luke records that the Lord sent out 72 preachers. The Jews understood that there were 72 nations in the world, based on the LXX of Gen. 10. Surely Luke's point is that they went only to the Jews, thus highlighting the gap between the disciples' understanding at the time, and the Lord's further reaching intention of a mission to the Gentiles.

The Lord sent out the 70 "before his face into every city to where he himself would come". They were heralds of His presence; and He goes on in this context to tell them that they were "as lambs among wolves"- i.e. they were like Him, *the* lamb- and that therefore "he that rejecteth you rejecteth me" (Lk. 10:1,3,16 RV). Yet significantly, having told the 70 to proclaim His face to the cities where He would come, we find the comment: "Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few [i.e. only 70]: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways..." (:2). Could this not mean that He would have travelled more extensively around Israel in His ministry than He did, but He was limited in the places He witnessed in by whether there were enough heralds to go there in advance and prepare the way? The dearth of workers meant that places He otherwise would have visited, He didn't- for it seems that He had a policy of only Himself working in areas where His men had broken the ground. And is there not some worrying relevance of all this for our work in *this* day, in *this* hard land...?

10:2 *And he said to them: The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest, that He send out labourers into His harvest-* The Lord had to comment that the harvest was great, but the labourers [i.e. the disciples] were few or weak [Gk.]. And yet He delegated so much to them- authority, the power of miracles, the Gospel itself (Lk. 9:1-6), despite their weakness, and despite the fact much harvest was spoilt or not harvested by their weakness. They were His representatives to the world (:16)- and yet they still didn't know how to pray (Lk. 11:1). We marvel at the way the Lord used them, and yet we end up realizing with a similar amazement that the same Lord has entrusted His Gospel to us, with all our weakness and dysfunction.

The Hebrew writer asked his brethren to pray for him "that I may be restored to you the sooner" (Heb. 13:19). The amount of prayer seems significant. The Lord Himself seems to have asked the disciples to add their prayers to His in asking the Father to send forth more labourers into the over-ripe, unharvested fields (Lk. 10:2), which, by implication, He

alone couldn't satisfactorily gather. Volume of prayer is significant, although this is not to say that 'just' one prayer of faith is ineffective.

10:3 *Go your way. See, I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves-* As He was the lamb of God sent forth for the salvation of men, so those in Him are sent forth with that same Gospel, as lambs. This was the language of the Jewish teachers about the role of Israel in the world; but the Lord is implying that His preachers are the new Israel, and the Jewish world is as the unbelieving Gentile world. Judah is spoken of as "One sheep attempting to survive among seventy wolves" (*Esther Rabbah* 10:11).

10:4 *Carry no purse, no wallet, no shoes; and greet no one on the way-* As we read the preaching of Jesus, one cannot but be impressed by the gravity of His message. He never spoke of His message, of His person and His Kingdom, in a take-it-or-leave-it way, as though it didn't matter how His hearers responded. And we ought to preach as He preached. He realized that how His hearers responded would determine the structure of their whole lives and what their eternal destiny would be. He urged His preachers to exchange no greetings on the road as they pressed on to take His Gospel to others. This would have been seen as most unusual and even offensive in first century Palestine. The people would have had their attention arrested by this- these preachers of the man from Nazareth had an urgency about them, a sense of utmost priority in the work they were about. They were to be known as men in an urgent hurry. They were to go on their preaching mission without pausing to greet others, such was their haste (cp. 2 Kings 4:29). The Greek word translated 'greet' also carries the idea of joining together with others. People rarely travelled alone unless they were in great haste, but rather moved in caravans. But for the Lord's messengers, there was to be no loss of time. Every minute was to be precious. In a world full of time wasting distractions, information we don't need to know... this is all so necessary. No wonder that when those men finally came to themselves, realized their calling, and hurled themselves in joy at this world after the Lord's ascension... they preached repentance, immediate conversion and quick baptism, right up front.

To not carry spare shoes is an allusion to God's miraculous provision for Israel in the wilderness. The preaching of the Gospel is a fundamental part of our wilderness journey. We are on a mission, a journey; and part of that mission is sharing the message with others.

10:5 *And into whatever house you shall enter, first say: Peace to this house-* The Lord raised everything to an altogether higher level. It was, for example, customary for Semitic peoples to greet each other [as it is today] with the words 'shalom!' or 'salaam!' ['peace']. But there was little

real meaning in those words. The Lord said that His peace, His 'shalom', He gives to us, not as the [Jewish] world gave it. Likewise He told His disciples to say "Peace be to this house" when they entered a home. Yet this was the standard greeting. What He surely meant was that they were to say it with meaning; and wish the household peace with God through His Son.

*10:6 And if a son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it, but if not, it shall return to you-* "Peace" meant peace with God; it had been John the Baptist's mission to guide the feet of Israel into the way of peace (Lk. 1:79). Very many had responded to John's message, but they failed to fully accept Jesus as Christ when it actually came to it. The mission of the apostles was likely to those who had responded to John; that would have been the logical program in any case, to go visit and develop interest amongst those who were already known to have responded to John the Baptist.

*10:7 And in that same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give. For the labourer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house-* See on Lk. 9:4.

Preaching is all about relationships. The Lord commanded to not go from house to house but rather build up a base in one home. I take this to mean that He saw the importance of relationship building in preaching, rather than a surface level contact with many people of the type achieved in more public addresses. He envisioned these houses as becoming the focus of house churches, which were to be the building blocks of the wider body of Christ.

Preaching is essentially about building relationships, not platform evangelism. The Lord taught that His preachers were not to go "from house to house" but rather to remain within an acceptive household and make that their base. In modern terms, I think we could interpret this as meaning: 'Focus on building relationships; don't build up a shallow relationship with a lot of people, but rather try to get deep with one household'.

The reference to eating and drinking what was offered, as noted on :8, would seem more likely to mean 'Accept their offer of table fellowship on whatever basis they offer it'.

The saying that "the labourer is worthy of his hire" is quoted as "Scripture" in 1 Tim. 5:18, on the same level of acceptance as the Old Testament. This indicates that the gospel records were in circulation in written form from an early stage after the events, and were accepted by the church as Divinely inspired. Higher criticism is simply wrong to claim that the gospels were written long after the events by men with dim memories.

As in all ages, it was common in the first century for religious teachers to expect payment. But here the Lord redefines that 'payment' as being no more than subsistence level.

10:8 *And into whatever city you enter, if they welcome you, eat such things as are set before you-* See on 1 Cor. 9:22; 10:27. I don't think the Lord simply means 'Don't be fussy about your food, be grateful for what's on your plate'. To eat together had religious dimensions. You ate together as a sign of fellowship. So I take the Lord to be meaning that they should accept whatever fellowship was offered to them, and work from within that setting to convince men of the truth of Christ.

10:9 *Heal the sick that are therein, and say to them: The kingdom of God comes near to you-* This again is the language of John's ministry; I suggested on :6 that the households being visited were those who had originally responded positively to John's message. The healing of the sick was to serve as an acted parable and exemplification of the gospel of the Kingdom.

10:10 *But into whatever city you shall enter and they do not welcome you, go out into the streets of it and say-* The language is very similar to that in 14:21, where Israelite rejection of the Gospel was to lead the preachers to go out into the streets of such cities- and drag in absolutely anyone they could find living on those streets.

10:11 *Even the dust from your city, that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God comes near-* Whether or not Israel accepted the Gospel, the Kingdom of God as it was in Messiah Jesus would still come. If the coming of the King and His Kingdom was not dependent upon Israel's acceptance of it, the implication had to be that the Gentiles would accept it, and therefore it would come.

The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38);

as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation by being finally "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

10:12 *I say to you, it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city-* Jer. 20:16 has a graphic description of the people of Sodom screaming out in anguish, both mental and physical, as the judgments of God fell upon them: "The cry in the morning (when the judgments began, Gen. 19:23,24), and the shouting at noontide". This is in reality a picture of the rejected in the last days. And yet those who heard the Christian Gospel and rejected it will be resurrected to a worse judgment than Sodom. The degrees of judgment ("more tolerable...") reflect degrees of responsibility to God according to varying levels of knowledge. The Sodomites had seen Lot's way of life and presumably been told by him that their behaviour was wrong. Their refusal to repent means that "in that day" of the Lord's coming they will be resurrected and punished; but those who hear the Christian gospel and reject it shall have a far greater punishment than Sodom had or will have.

10:13 *Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which were done in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes-* See on Lk. 19:42. The pain that arises from knowing what might have been is really the essence of grief and tragedy; and the Father and Son who know all possible futures must therefore feel so pained. The connection between grief and knowing what might have been is so poignantly brought out by the grief of Martha and Mary over their brother's death- they knew that if Jesus had have been there, Lazarus wouldn't have died (Jn. 11:21,32). Jesus as God's Son had something of this ability to see what might have been- hence He could state with absolute confidence that if Gentile Tyre and Sidon had witnessed His miracles, they would've repented in sackcloth and ashes. He lamented with pain over the fact that things would have been so much better for Jerusalem if she had only known / apprehended the things which would bring her ultimate peace (Lk. 19:42). The Lord Jesus was deeply pained at what might have been, if the things of God's Kingdom had not remained wilfully hidden from Israel's perception. His pain was because of realizing what might have been. In this He was directly reflecting the mind of His Father, who had previously lamented over Jerusalem: "O that you had hearkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river" (Is. 48:18).

10:14 *But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment, than for you-* The Lord taught His preachers that if people rejected their message, *in that day* when they did this, "it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city". But He repeats Himself later on: "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon *in the judgment* than for you" (Lk. 10:12,14 RV). "In that day" clearly refers to the day on which the preacher's message was rejected. But that day was effectively their judgment day.

10:15 *And you, Capernaum, shall you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades-* Some will be exalted and others brought down at the day of judgment ("come up higher... go down lower", 14:10). Capernaum was expecting commendation and exaltation at judgment day; but that was to be the very reason why she would be cast down to destruction. And in essence, that judgment process is ongoing whenever people hear the Gospel (:18).

As He sent the 70 away on their preaching mission, the Lord commented that Capernaum was exalted to heaven, and yet at the judgment would be thrust down to hell; and yet when they returned, He said that He had seen Satan falling from heaven to earth (Lk. 10:15,18), in anticipation of how it will at judgment day (Rev. 12). The connection is not co-incidental. He was countering the disciples' joy at the superficial response by saying that He has seen it another way; He had seen the Satan of the Jewish system already condemned, hurled from heaven to earth, by their rejection of the Gospel preached.

10:16 *He that hears you hears me; and he that rejects you rejects me, and he that rejects me rejects Him that sent me-* Here we see the Lord Jesus personally equated with His word in the Gospel, preached by His followers. Attitudes to that word are attitudes to Him. The rejection of some at the last day will be because they themselves rejected the Lord. They made the answer in their attitude to His word; in that sense those who "reject" (s.w.) the Lord are judged by His word at the last day (Jn. 12:48). Attention to His word is therefore critical. Whoever rejects us as we preach therefore rejects God (1 Thess. 4:8 s.w.).

10:17 *And the seventy returned with joy, saying: Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!-* As noted on :9, the miracles were to back up the preaching of the word of the Kingdom; but the disciples failed to properly perceive this. They considered that the miracles they had done were of themselves the most impressive thing; whereas the Lord always gave priority to the preaching of the word over miracles, and Himself used an economy of miracle to get His message over. He therefore urges them to rejoice more in the fact that they personally will be saved in the Kingdom (:20).

10:18 *And he said to them: I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven-* No sinful being can be tolerated in God's presence in Heaven (Mt. 6:10; Ps. 5: 4,5; Hab. 1:13). The Lord is using parabolic language - "as lightning fall from heaven" (AV)- so this "Satan" or adversary fell. Lightning comes from heaven in the sense of the sky, not as in the dwelling place of God. It doesn't literally fall from heaven to earth. Any attempt to link this with the prince of this world being cast out is difficult, because that happened at Christ's death (note "now" in Jn. 12:31), whereas this falling of Satan occurred during His ministry. According to popular thought, "Satan" is supposed to have fallen from heaven in Eden, so that he was on the earth at Job's time, yet Jesus is described as seeing this occurring at His time. Weymouth adds a marginal note on Lk. 10:18 in his translation of the Bible: "The thought is not that of Milton's rebel angel banished for ever from the abode of bliss". If an evil being and his host of followers fell down on to earth literally, why did only Jesus see it and not the disciples? Why is there no other record of this strange event? Falling from heaven is figurative of losing authority, e.g. it is used about the demise of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14. See also Lamentations 2:1 and Jeremiah 51:53.

The apostles had just cured many people and were blinded by their great physical power over disease (:20). The real cause of illness and disease is our sin prone nature. That sin is the ultimate reason for illness is stressed in Mt. 9:12 and 12:11, where a sheep gone astray, a clear symbol of a sinner (Mt. 18:13), is equated with a sick man. The principle is summed up in Mt. 9:5 "Which is easier, to say, Your sins be forgiven you; or to say, Arise and walk?". Thus Jesus said, "I beheld Satan fall", i.e. "In My view the great thing was that the power of sin was being overcome". There must be a connection with the fall of Capernaum in :15. Is Jesus implying that "Satan", the ways of the flesh, which were so well exemplified in Capernaum, were being overcome? Notice that Capernaum was "exalted" in Jewish eyes. "Satan" often referring to the Jewish system, maybe Jesus is equating Capernaum with "Satan" and commenting how the sin which was at the basis of this system was being toppled by the preaching of the Gospel.

10:19 *See, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall in any way hurt you-* See on Mk. 16:18; Jn. 8:44. This is a promise repeated in the context of preaching the Gospel in Mk. 16:18. The gift of the Spirit continues to assist Christian preachers, but only in the first century was it manifested in such miraculous forms; and even then, only in specific times and places during the course of missionary work. Paul taking up a viper in his hand and being unharmed on Malta would be an example.

10:20 *Nevertheless, rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you, but*

*rejoice that your names are written in heaven*- This implies that their elation at being able to pull off miracles was wrong, or at best immature; rather should they have rejoiced that their names were written in Heaven; that the good news of future salvation in the Kingdom they preached was so personally true.

10:21 *In that same hour he rejoiced in spirit, and said*- This was the kind of rejoicing in spirit (cp. rejoicing about subject spirits in :20) which they should have had- a glorying in the Father's way of working with the simple and marginalized.

*I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes. Yes, Father. For so it was pleasing in Your sight*- See on Lk. 1:47; 9:45. This is the standard Jewish thanksgiving before food: "I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth...". We expect to hear thanks for food, but instead find praise for how the Father works with people by revealing truths to babes rather than the worldly wise. As was the case with the Samaritan woman, the Lord found the Father's working with other people His food and drink which sustained Him. And it can be so with us too. This is one reason for meeting together and sharing testimony of the Lord's work in our lives.

The disciples didn't have totally correct understanding; they believed in ghosts and demons, and were too maxed out on miracles (:20). But still the Lord rejoices in what has been revealed to them, the babes; and those same truths had not been revealed to the Jewish leadership who claimed to be wise and understanding. We note that truths are "revealed" by God in a sovereign way. It's not simply that whoever reads the Bible understands. There is a higher hand at work than that; the way of God's grace, revealing truths to the "babes".

10:22 *All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomever the Son wills to reveal Him*- Again as noted on :21 there is a distinct revelation of the Father to people through the Son. This can mean simply that in the Son, we see the Father reflected. And yet the language goes somewhat further than that, in saying that the Son chooses some to whom to reveal the Father. This is by the work of the Spirit of Christ, which refers both to the spirit of the character and personality of the Lord Jesus and also to how that spirit transforms human hearts, under His direction. "Knows" is in a continuous sense, implying that the Father and Son grow in knowing each other; the knowledge in view is the Hebraic sense of knowledge as relationship, rather than increments of factual knowledge. The "all things" delivered to the Son may be the power of salvation for all men.

Nobody, the disciples included, to whom the Father had 'revealed' repentance, fully knew the Son nor the Father. There is a parallel to be observed here between 'knowing the Father' and repenting; for the context in Mt. 11 speaks of how the majority had not repented despite the Lord's miracles. The little ones, the babes, the disciples, had repented- but this had been 'revealed' to them by the Father (Mt. 11:25). Now, the Lord speaks of how the Son 'reveals' the Father. The life of repentance is the life of knowing the Father. To know God is to know our sinfulness and repent. And this is the "rest" from sin which the Lord speaks of in Mt. 11:28.

Whether or not Joseph died or left Mary by the time Jesus hit adolescence, the fact was that Joseph wasn't His real father. He was effectively fatherless in the earthly sense. As such, this would have set Him up in certain psychological matrices which had their effect on His personality. He could speak of His Heavenly Father in the shockingly unprecedented form of 'abba', daddy. He grew so close to His Heavenly Father because of the lack of an earthly one, and the inevitable stresses which there would have been between Him and Joseph. A strong, fatherly-type figure is a recurrent feature of the Lord's parables; clearly He was very focused upon His Heavenly Father. He could say with passionate truth: "No one knows a son except a father, and no one knows a father except a son" (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22 Gk.).

The idea is not that the Lord Jesus had a list of humanity and chose a few from that list. He has earlier spoken of the freedom of choice to 'receive' (Mt. 11:14) God's message, and He was urging all men to do so. Although all men are potentially delivered to Him, the Father is revealing Himself to only some of them. The Father is revealed in the Son, as John's Gospel makes clear. It's not that some people are chosen by the Son to have this revelation; rather is it a statement of fact, or method- the knowledge of the Father is through the Son revealing Him. And this is why He goes straight on in Mt. 11:28 to urge people to come to Him. The ideas of coming to Him and 'whomsoever', anyone, are very much the language of John's Gospel and the Revelation, which concludes with an appeal to 'whosoever will' to 'come' to Christ and salvation.

The revealing is by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:5). It was not flesh and blood that revealed the Lord to Peter (Mt. 16:17). As noted on 1 Pet. 1:21, relationship with God is predicated upon relationship with the Son; He is the only way to the Father. Academic Bible study, consideration of the apparent evidence of apologetics, will not reveal God as Father to men. It is the Son who reveals Him. If we take the jump of faith in accepting Him, only then will He reveal the Father to us.

10:23 *And turning to the disciples, he said privately: Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see-* See on Lk. 7:9. As noted on :22, to have

the Son reveal the Father to us is the work of the Spirit, and is of grace. The idea of predestined calling is discussed by Paul in Romans in the context of explaining how the Spirit works. The fact we have been called to know Him is grace indeed.

10:24 *For I say to you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them-* The blessedness of :23 also relates to where we stand in human history. There was a desire amongst the Old Testament heroes to know more about the Lord Jesus; but then was not the time for the full manifestation now given. We who have the completed New Testament, and easy access to it, are perhaps even more blessed. This insight into 'blessedness' is helpful when in moments of depression we may consider that we lack blessing, and all we have are vague, dimly revealed ideas that somehow 'God loves me'. We can indeed count our blessings and name them one by one. And where we stand in history is one of them, according to the Lord's reasoning here. It may well be that we are blessed to be the generation which see the Lord's return- the only generation to never taste of death.

10:25 *And a certain lawyer stood up, and to test him, asked: Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?-* When the lawyer asked Jesus what he must "do to inherit eternal life", the Lord could have lectured him on salvation being by grace rather than works. But He doesn't; instead He tells the parable of the good Samaritan, running with the lawyer's misunderstanding for a while [as His gracious manner was]. The essential basis of inheriting eternal life is of course faith, but the Lord's answer to the question shows that we can safely conclude: 'Faith must be shown in our care for the salvation of this world if it is real faith'.

10:26 *And he said to him: What is written in the law? How do you read it?-* The Lord was not searching for a right or wrong answer, ready to respond to the effect that 'Ah well, you just misunderstood a bit, now let Me correct you'. His questions are nearly always rhetorical. Whatever the answer, the Lord would work with it.

10:27 *And he answered saying: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself-* He quotes Dt. 6:5 along with Lev. 19:18. Dt. 6:5 along with Dt. 11:13 was repeated by the Jews morning and evening, and was the text written in the phylacteries. But this zealous lawyer added Lev. 19:18 about loving neighbours.

10:28 *And he said to him: You have answered correctly-* We have eternal life insofar as the life that Jesus lived and lives, He will eternally live. If we live that life, we are living the essence of the life which we will eternally live. The lawyer asked the Lord what good thing he must do "to

inherit eternal life". The Lord replied that he must properly love his God and his neighbour: "this do, and you shall live". By living a life based on this, he would be living the life which he would eternally live (Lk. 10:25,28). And thus the Lord responds to the query about inheriting eternal life by changing the emphasis of the question- He replies by speaking of the life we should be living now.

That God is one is not just a numerical description. If there is only one God, He therefore demands our *all*. Because He is the One God, He demands all our worship; and because He is One, He therefore treats all His people the same, regardless, e.g., of their nationality (Rom. 3:30). All true worshippers of the one God, whether Jew or Gentile, are united in that the one God offers salvation to them on the same basis. The fact there is only one Lord Jesus implies the same for Him (Rom. 10:12). Paul saw these implications in the doctrine of the unity of God. But that doctrine needs reflecting on before we come to grasp these conclusions. Christ taught that the command that God was one and therefore we must love God *included* the second command: to love our neighbour as ourselves. The first and second commands were in fact one command; they were inseparably part of the first commandment (Mk. 12:29-31). This is why the 'two' commandments, to love God and neighbour, are spoken of in the singular in Lk. 10:27,28: "*this* do...". If God is one, then our brother bears the one Name of God, and so to love God is to love our brother (cp. 1 Jn. 4:21). And because there is only one God, this demands *all* our spiritual energy. There is only one, the one God, who seeks glory for men and judges them (Jn. 8:50)- therefore the unity of God should mean we do not seek glory of men, neither do we judge our brother.

*This do and you shall live*- The context is that the lawyer asked the Lord Jesus what he should do "to inherit eternal life" (Lk.10:25), and in a sense we ask the same question. But we mustn't be quite like him, in thinking that if we physically *do* certain things, then we will at some future point be given eternal life as a kind of payment; and nor should we think that the eternity of the Kingdom life is the most important aspect of our salvation. In Lk. 18:18 "a certain ruler asked him" the very same question: What he should do to inherit eternal life. The Lord's response was that if he kept the commandments in the right spirit, he would "have treasure in heaven". When the man found this impossible, the Lord commented how hard it was for the rich to "enter into the kingdom of God" (Lk. 18:24). So there is a parallel here between inheriting eternal life, having treasure in heaven, and entering the Kingdom. We are told that now is the time, in this life, for us to lay up treasure in Heaven (Mt. 6:20). So here and now it is possible to have treasure in Heaven, to have eternal life in prospect. In a sense we now have eternal life (1 Jn. 5:11,13), in a sense we are now in the process of entering into the Kingdom. We have been translated, here and now, into the Kingdom (Col.

1:13). The very same Greek construction used in Col. 1:13 occurs in Acts 14:22, where Paul says that through much tribulation we enter into the Kingdom; in other words, entry into the Kingdom is an ongoing process, and we experience this on account of the effect of our trials. Entering the Kingdom is used to describe our response to the Gospel in Lk. 16:16: "The kingdom of God is preached, and every man presses into it". Unless we receive the Gospel of the kingdom as a child, we will not enter it; i.e. respond fully to that Gospel (Lk. 18:17).

In prospect we have been saved, we are now in Christ, and therefore the great salvation which he was given is therefore counted to all those who are in him. We shy away from the positive promises that we really can start to enter the Kingdom now, that we do now have eternal life in prospect. But this shying away is surely an indication of our lack of faith; our desperate unwillingness to believe so fully and deeply that our salvation really is so wonderfully assured. That eternal life dwells in us insofar as the eternal spirit of Christ is in us. And so as we face up to the sureness of these promises, we earnestly want to know what we must *do* to inherit this eternal life, to have this great treasure of assured salvation laid up for us now in Heaven. Of course we are saved by our faith, not our works (Tit. 3:5-7); yet our faith, if it is real, will inevitably be shown in practical ways.

10:29 *But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus: And who is my neighbour?*- The Lord's open attitude towards Gentiles had provoked anger amongst the lawyers; hence this scribe had incorporated Lev. 19:18 into his standard quotation as to Jewish duty. He suspected the Lord considered the Gentile world as His neighbours. The man's pan for self-justification was going to be demolished by the Lord turning it all around to show that justification is by grace, not works- the very ideas which Paul states more specifically and theologically in Romans.

10:30 *Jesus answered and said: A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he encountered robbers who both stripped him and beat him, and departed leaving him half dead*- The wounded man is all of us- "a certain man" (Lk. 10:30) is a phrase more usually translated 'any man', 'whomsoever' etc. The idea of journeying downwards from Jerusalem to Jericho has some definite OT connections, not least with wicked King Zedekiah, who ignored repeated prophetic plea to repent and fled from Jerusalem to Jericho, only to be overtaken on the way by the Babylonians and sent to Babylon to condemnation (2 Kings 25:4). 'You're every one a Zedekiah', is the implication- but we've been saved from out of that condemnation by the Samaritan's grace. Another allusion is to the incident in 2 Chron. 28:15, where the captured enemies of Israel are marched from Jerusalem to Jericho, and yet by grace they are given clothes, food and water. In all these allusions, Jesus is radically reversing all the roles. The true people of God are the repentant enemies of the

people of God, the "thieves" who spoil the people of God are the Jewish elders (Hos. 6:1,29), the Divine Saviour is not a Jew but a Samaritan etc.

One of the many Old Testament quarries for this good Samaritan parable is found in 2 Chron. 28:15 (Another will be found in Hos. 6:1,2,9, which seems to equate the Jewish priesthood with the thieves which attacked the man. This was also Christ's estimation of them (Mt. 21:13; Jn. 10:1). This allusion would have been especially relevant in the first century context. Another connection will be found in 2 Kings 25:4). Here we read how Israel attacked Judah whilst Judah were apostate, and took them captives. But then they realized their own shortcomings, and the fact that Judah really were their brethren; then they "clothed all that were naked among (the captives taken from Judah), and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho...to their brethren". Now there is allusion after allusion to this scene in the Samaritan parable. Surely our Lord had his eye on this incident as he devised that parable. The point he was making as surely this: 'In trying to follow my example of total love for your brethren, your spiritual neighbours, remember your own shortcomings, and what the Lord has done for you by His grace; and then go and reflect this to your brethren'.

The helplessness of the injured man is a fine picture of our weakness. We can only accept salvation; there is nothing we can *do* to earn it. Hence the Lord warned those who *seek* to *save* their own lives (Lk. 17:33)- He uses the same two words to explain how *He* is the one who seeks and saves (Lk. 19:10). Acceptance of salvation is perhaps what faith is all about in its barest essence.

As the man was stripped and wounded, so identical language is used about the sufferings of the Lord on the cross (Mt. 27:28,29; Lk. 20:12; Zech. 13:6). As his would-be neighbours passed him by on the other side, so the neighbours of the Lord stood aloof from his stricken body on the cross (Ps. 38:11 AVmg.). Through this he can fully enter into our broken hearts, into our intense spiritual loneliness without him (if only we would realize it) and therefore he will come alongside us with a heart of true compassion. So because of his sufferings which we now behold, he can so truly, so truly and exactly, empathize with our spiritual state.

The description of the stricken man being "stripped" of his clothing uses the very same word, rarely used in the NT, to describe the 'stripping' of the Lord Jesus at the time of His death (Mt. 27:28,21; Mk. 15:20). Likewise the robbers 'left him' (Lk. 10:30), in the same as the Lord was 'left' alone by the disciples to face the end alone (Mk. 14:50 s.w.). The robbers "wounded him" (Lk. 10:30), a phrase which translates two Greek words, 'to lay upon' and 'stripes'. The cross was 'laid upon' Jesus (Lk. 23:26 s.w.); and we are familiar with the idea of the Lord being 'wounded' and receiving 'stripes' in His final sufferings (Is. 53:5). The

connection is surely that in the process of His death, the Lord came to know the feelings of the stripped and stricken people whom He came to save. No wonder He can powerfully "have compassion" upon us. And it's been pointed out elsewhere that the 'two pennies' paid by the Samaritan are the equivalent of the half shekel atonement money under the Mosaic Law, whereby a man could be redeemed.

It's easy to think that the focus of the parable is upon being like the good Samaritan; but the focus equally is upon seeing ourselves in the wounded man. The Lord's answers to questions nearly always seem to provide a simple answer to them, and yet more subtly turn them upon their head, and redefine the terms. The parable was told in response to the question "What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?". One answer appears to be: 'Recognize you're the injured man. Accept the Good Samaritan's salvation; for the Law which you so love can't save you'. Indeed if read the other way around, the Lord's answer would appear to be 'If you want eternal life, you must *do* lots of good works, after the pattern of the good Samaritan'. But this would contradict the whole message of salvation by pure grace which was central to the Lord's teaching. It seems to me that the parable is often interpreted that way- and it's actually the very opposite of how the Lord wished us to read it. No matter how much good we *do* to people along the way, this cannot give us the life eternal.

10:31 *And by chance a certain priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side-* The radical nature of the Lord Jesus is reflected in His teaching style. His parables work around what I have elsewhere called "elements of unreality". They involve a clash of the familiar, the comfortable, the normal, with the strange and unreal and radical. The parables are now so well known that their radical nature has been almost buried under the avalanche of familiarity. The parables begin by getting the hearers sympathetic and onboard with the story line- and then, in a flick of the tail, the whole punch line is turned round against their expectations, with radical demands. The story of a man travelling the Jerusalem-Jericho road alone would've elicited sympathy and identity with the hearers- yes, that road *is* awfully dangerous. And then the priest and Levite pass by and don't help. That was realistic- "priests and Levites were known to have quarters in the Jordan valley near Jericho where they retreated from the beehive of activity surrounding the temple". The common people were anticlerical, and yes, they could just imagine the priest and Levite passing by. "Typical!" would've been their comment. They're all set up to expect the Messianic Jewish working class hero to stride in to the rescue. But... it's a despised Samaritan who stops and gives saving help. They had expected a Jewish Saviour- and Jesus, the teller of the parable, claimed to be just that. But... in the story, He's represented by a Samaritan. Remember that

Samaritans and Jews had no dealings, and people were amazed that Jesus would even speak with the Samaritan woman at the well. Even in desperation, a Jew wouldn't have wanted to be helped by a Samaritan. You had to be utterly desperate to accept such help. Moments earlier, the audience had been identifying with the injured Jewish man. But... were they really *that* desperate, did they appreciate their desperation to that extent, to keep "in" the story, and accept that that desperate man was really them? They wanted to be able to identify with the hero. But no, they had to first of all identify with the wounded, dying, desperate Jew. And only then were they bidden "Go and do likewise"- 'be like the Samaritan'. The Lord's initial audience would have been left with knitted eyebrows and deep introspection at the end of it. The whole thing was too challenging for many. They quit the parable, quit identifying with the story... just as we can when it gets too demanding. It's a tragedy that this amazing story, crafted in such a radically demanding way, has been reduced to merely 'Be a good neighbour to the guy next door, so long as it doesn't demand too much of you'- which is what the story has come to mean for the majority of professed Christians today. That of itself indicates a discomfort with the radical nature of the demands.

It's the same with Nathan's parable to David. It elicited David's sympathy- and then it was turned back on David: "You are the man!". But he didn't quit the parable. He acted on it, as we have to. The parable of the self-righteous older son is just the same. The parable's story line leads us to expect that the wayward son repents and is accepted back by his father. But then right at the end, the whole thing takes a biting twist. We suddenly realize that the prodigal son and the need to forgive your wayward son isn't the point of the story- for that's something which comes naturally to any father and family. The whole point is that the son who played safe, who stayed home and behaved himself... *he* is the one who ends up outside of the family's joy because of his self-righteousness. *He* ends up the villain, the lost son. Again, there'd have been knotted brows and an exit from identity with the story line. And the way generations of Christians have described the story as "the parable of the lost / prodigal son" shows how they [we] too have so often missed the essentially radical point of the story.

10:32 *And in like manner a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side-* See on :31. When we analyse this good Samaritan parable, it becomes clear that we are not simply intended to do good deeds to people we meet, copying the Samaritan. We are also aptly represented by the wounded man; it is the Lord Jesus who is the good Samaritan. The Law of Moses, symbolized by the priest and Levite, came near to man's stricken condition, and had a close look at it. Lk. 10:32 (Young's Literal) brings this out: "Having been about the place, having come and seen...", the Levite passed on by. The Jews regarded

Christ as a Samaritan, so they would have immediately understood the Samaritan of the parable to represent Jesus (Jn. 8:48). The good Samaritan having compassion on the man and being moved to do something about him has echoes of the Lord's compassion on the multitudes (:33). His promise to come again after two days (he gave two pence, and a penny a day was a fair rate, Mt. 20:2) is a clear connection with the Lord's promise to come again (after 2000 years from his departure?).

10:33 *But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion-* The Samaritan "was moved with compassion" by the man's (spiritual) state. This is the same phrase as used concerning how Christ "was moved with compassion" by the multitudes. The connection with the good Samaritan parable would invite us to read the Lord's compassion as fundamentally *spiritual*. The reason for the miracles was to confirm the spoken word (Mk. 16:20), to lead men to see the wisdom of the message they were validating (Mk. 6:2). Are there any examples of Christ doing miracles for reasons unconnected with preaching? They often (always?) had symbolic meaning; and were designed to inculcate faith (Jn. 20:31) and repentance (Mt. 11:21). And in any case, His miracles were largely to benefit the Covenant people, or those closely associated with them. The apostles didn't do mass benefit miracles (e.g. feeding thousands of people) to back up their preaching in the Gentile world; even though they had the power to do "greater works" than did the Lord (Jn. 14:12). 'Charitable' giving ought to be *associated* with preaching, surely, if we are to follow the example of Christ's compassion with the multitudes. In practice, the work of providing welfare and conducting fresh preaching is done by the same brethren in the mission field.

The Lord Jesus "knew what was in man", not only by direct revelation from the Father and the Old Testament word, but also from His own observation of our own nature, both in Himself and the surrounding world. The sensitivity of Jesus is reflected in this realization which He reflects. As the Samaritan came near to the wounded man (the ecclesia), realized the extent of his problem (the ravages of sin) and was thereby moved with compassion, so Christ was motivated by His consideration of our position (Lk. 10:33,34); the Lord realized His humanity more and more, and progressively humbled Himself, achieving a progressively fuller identity with us by so doing, until He crowned it all by His death (Phil. 2:6-8). The main lying helpless on the Jerusalem - Jericho road was surely modelled on Zedekiah being overtaken there by his enemies (Jer. 39:5). See on Lk. 14:9.

10:34 *And came to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil*

*and wine, and he put him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him-* He "bound up his wounds", alluding to the manner in which Christ was to bind up the broken hearted (Is. 61:1). He cured those mental wounds by pouring in oil and wine, symbols of his word and his blood respectively. So the brutal beating up of that man, leaving him half dead, refers to the broken-heartedness which the sin of this world and our own natures inflicts upon us. Picture the scene on that Jericho road, the body covered in blood and dust, massive bruises swelling up, flies buzzing around on the congealed blood, face in the dust, frightened donkey neighing among the scrub somewhere. That is the very picture of our broken heartedness, the broken heartedness which Christ came to heal. The physical grossness of those wounds is a picture of our mental state. Yet the flesh deceives us that there is nothing really that wrong with our minds, with our natures. Yet there *is*, and we need to come to terms with it more and more completely, to realize our deep mental need for Christ's healing. Once we do this, we will be able to see the need, the urgent need, for his healing of our *minds* through his spirit, his perfect, clean mind, being in us. And how were those wounds healed? How are our mental wounds healed? By the Son of God tearing up his own garments to bandage up the wounds (how else did he do it?), and healing us with his blood and his word.

"He brought him to the inn" can also be translated "He led it [the donkey] to the inn". In this case, the Samaritan is acting as a servant, for it is the master who rides on the donkey and the servant who walks on foot, leading it there. Remember how Haman has to lead the horse on which Mordecai rides (Esther 6:7-11). All this speaks of how the Lord took upon Himself the form of a servant in order to lead us to salvation- when at the time we could do nothing, and had no awareness of the huge grace being shown to us. The Samaritan was of course making himself vulnerable to attack by robbers by doing this. But think through it some more. There was an eye-for-eye vengeance syndrome alive and well at that time. If a Samaritan turned up with a wounded Jew, it would look for all the world like *he* was responsible for the damage. It would be the first time a Samaritan was known to have done such an act of kindness. And he risks himself all the more, by staying at the inn, leaving, and then returning there, thus willing to face the inevitable suspicion that *he* had attacked the man, or was somehow involved in the incident. This risking of His own salvation was what the cross was all about. The parable gives a rare window into the Lord's self-perception on this point. And so for us- we may stay up all night serving someone's need, only to make ourselves irritable and impatient and more prone to sin ourselves the next day. And in any case, it's my experience that no good deed goes unpunished; we have to pay various prices for it in this life. In all these things we are living out the spirit of the Samaritan saviour.

Until the good Samaritan's return, the man was kept in the inn, with everything that was needed lavishly provided. Surely the inn is symbolic of the ecclesia; in the ecclesia there should be a common sense of spiritual improvement, of growing in health, of remembering our extraordinary deliverance, realizing our weakness, looking forward to seeing the Samaritan again to praise him for the wonder of it all. This ought to characterize our gatherings as the church. Who is the innkeeper? He may just be part of the furniture of the parable, as I have yet to find a convincing interpretation.

The parables, especially those which Luke records, appear to end leaving us with unanswered questions. Does the wounded traveller survive and get better? When does the Samaritan return? How much does it cost him? Was the beaten man happy to see the Samaritan when he returned? Who inherits the property of the rich fool? Does the barren fig tree produce a crop in the end? Does the elder brother finally join in the party? Does the unjust steward succeed in getting himself out of his problems after his dismissal? What happens to the rich man's five brothers, seeing Lazarus isn't allowed to go and warn them? Do they hear Moses and the prophets? Do the riff raff come in from the lanes to the Great Supper? Does the unjust judge actually resolve the widow's complaints? How does the rich merchant survive, after having sold all he has for the one pearl, thus discarding his entire past, his life's work...? And what does he do with the pearl? He, presumably, sits and treasures it, but can do nothing with it in order to prosper materially... And yet we are left to reflect upon this. See on Mt. 13:44; Lk. 14:32.

*10:35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the host, and said: Take care of him, and if you spend more, I, when I come back again, will repay you-* His promise to come again after two days (he gave two pence, and a penny a day was a fair rate, Mt. 20:2) is a clear connection with the Lord's promise to come again (after 2000 years from his departure?).

The 'two pennies' paid by the Samaritan are the equivalent of the half shekel atonement money under the Mosaic Law, whereby a man could be redeemed. Our redeemer is of course the Lord Jesus. The redemption was 'paid' in His blood- which implies His putting us on *His* beast of burden and carrying us to the inn, where He paid the money, is a picture of His final sufferings which lead up to the actual shedding of His blood.

The parable of the good Samaritan explains how Christ took compassion on the stricken spiritual state of us His people, picked us up, made Himself vulnerable to attack by placing the man on His donkey, and caused us to be fully healed. The Samaritan was less vulnerable than the robbed man, on account of having a donkey. But he made himself even more vulnerable than the robbed man had been, in order to take him to

the inn. The picture of the wounded man straddled over the donkey and the Samaritan walking patiently alongside shows what easy prey they would have been. The whole process of the man's redemption by this Samaritan is an account of the cross of Christ (not least the pouring in of wine and oil). The implication is that through seeking to save us, Christ made Himself more vulnerable than He would have been if He sought only His own salvation. And the Samaritan's speed of progress was more than halved; he had to walk rather than ride, keeping the wounded man balanced on the donkey. This parable seems to reveal that Christ realized at least in some abstract sense that His concern for us in some ways made it more difficult for Him; although the reality was that the motivation for His victory was largely due to His sense of responsibility for us. The idea of Him taking care for the man is expressed in the language of Ex. 21:19, which says that if a man wounds another, "he shall pay... and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed". This somewhat odd allusion (at first sight) surely indicates that the Lord took upon Himself the full blame for our stricken condition, presumably in the sense that as the second Adam He took upon Himself the guilt of Adam. This is why there are so many connections between His death and the effects of Adam's sin (e.g. the crown of *thorns*, the Garden etc.). The way Christ compared Himself to a Samaritan, half Jew and half Gentile, shows that especially on the cross, this is how He felt. He was mindful of both Jewish and Gentile aspects of His future body as He died. The Jews (and His own brothers, Ps. 69:8) treated Him as half Gentile (from a Roman soldier, the Midrash claims).

So we are as it were in the inn, thinking back to our salvation by that suffering Samaritan, the strangeness and yet the glorious *wonder* of it all. I'm sure we are meant to fill in the unspoken details in his parable. Of course the saved man would have re-lived time and again his wondrous salvation, how he had come to with the eyes of that man peering earnestly into his, the laying on the ass, and the slow journey to the inn. As Israel remembered their Passover deliverance through the Passover feast, so we lie on our sickbed in the inn, as it were, and remember our great salvation.

10:36 *Which of these three, do you think, proved a neighbour to him that encountered the robbers?*- The Samaritan parable appears to be an example of the way the Lord left His parables open to multiple interpretations and reflections, all of which express aspects of the many truths He was expressing to us. We need to reflect who the 'neighbour' actually is. The parable is told in extension of the Lord's approval of the statement that to love God is to love our neighbour, and vice versa (:27). The Lord was explaining that what we have to 'do' to get eternal life is to perceive that *God* is our neighbour. This is and was a challenging idea. As challenging and provocative as when a black sister in southern USA said to me once 'Ya know, God's ma nigger'. She meant, 'God's my buddy, my

close one'. The turning point of the parable is in its end stress [as so often in these stories of the Lord]: "Which of these three... was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves?" (Lk. 10:36). Obviously, the neighbour was the Samaritan, whom we have shown to be symbolic of God and His Son. *This* is the answer to the question of the lawyer: 'And who is my neighbour?'. Answer: God / Jesus. The lawyer was wondering to whom he should do his good deeds. So he asks 'Who is my neighbour?'. He misunderstood the whole thing, as people do today. The Lord was turning the question around. Who is your neighbour? God / Jesus is your neighbour. You are lying there stricken. Your fellow lawyers and legalists / Priests / Levites can't help you. To receive eternal life, you must let God be your neighbour. *This* is the work of God, to believe on the one whom He sent (Jn. 6:29). This was the Lord's response to a similar question about what good works ought to be done. And the Samaritans were despised and rejected... yet the Lord chose them as a symbol of Himself. It's easy to under-estimate just how much the Jews despised Samaritans- "The Samaritans were publicly cursed in the synagogues; and a petition was daily offered up praying God that the Samaritans might not be partakers of eternal life" (W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Gospel Parables In The Light Of Their Jewish Background* (London: SPCK, 1936) p. 102). We see the sheer bravery of the Lord in framing the parable as He did. He doesn't chose to speak of a good Jew helping a stricken Samaritan; it's the other way around. The watchful student will find up to 12 allusions in the Good Samaritan parable back to Hosea 6:1-10- which portray the Jews as the robbers, and God as the Samaritan saviour. It is none less than Yahweh Himself who "will bind us up... revive us... raise us up... come to us"- all the very things which the Samaritan did. In all this was a huge challenge to the Lord's audience- as to whether they would accept His grace. "Oil and wine are forbidden objects if they emanate from a Samaritan" (J.D.M. Derrett, *Law In The New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970) p. 220)- hence the challenge to the Jews in accepting the Lord's teaching. We in our turn struggle with the extent and purity of His grace.

But of course, we are intended to be the Good Samaritan too- in that we are to manifest and replicate the saving work of Jesus in our lives and in our interactions with people. There are details in the parables that need to be thought about, the story reconstructed. The Samaritan 'happened' to have "oil and wine" with him, i.e. medicaments for a wounded man (the wine would have been an antiseptic). And he was travelling alone, when people usually travelled in convoys. And the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, they wouldn't even talk with them on the street (Jn. 4:9). So perhaps the Lord intended us to figure that the Samaritan was actually going to help one of his fellow Samaritans who needed attention, but on the way, he met one of another race in even greater need, and changed his plans in order to save him. In all this we have an exquisite example of the self-revelation of Jesus in His own parables- for He saw Himself as the

Samaritan. And for us too, the call to save often comes when we are on our way to do something else, at the most inconvenient moment, to people we would never have considered would need nor accept our help towards salvation.

The parable of the good Samaritan needs careful reflection before we see in it a command to concentrate on giving to the world. It is used as Biblical evidence for a social gospel. The Samaritan was "neighbour unto him that fell among thieves" (Lk. 10:36)- i.e. the story shows how he fulfilled the command to love our neighbour. We have shown above that this command refers to love for those related to the Covenant. The Samaritan represented Christ. The mugged man was those He came to save; not the world generally, for they have not all accepted His healing. We must go and do likewise; in showing the love of Christ to the world. But we have earlier defined that love as being paramountly *spiritual*, and relating to the work of the cross. The parable was teaching the inability of the Law to save man *spiritually*, not materially.

10:37 *And he said: The one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him: Go and do likewise-* There's ample evidence that the despised Samaritan of this parable refers to the Lord Jesus. He was 'neighbour' to stricken humanity, he came near to us, binding up our broken hearts, and carried us to the haven of the ecclesia. "Go and do likewise" is therefore a real challenge to us: to have the same dedication for others' salvation as Christ had. His zeal to achieve God's plan of redemption should be ours. Remember how the good Samaritan parable is an exposition of how to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind (:27). Every fibre of the Lord's mind and body was bent *for us*, for bringing about God's plan of redemption. He loved us, his neighbour, as himself. Because of this it is impossible to separate Christ from the work He came to do, i.e. our redemption. The point of the good Samaritan parable is to teach us that his same devotion to the work of conquering sin should be seen in us; our concern for the salvation of others should be as great as that for our own. We need to be totally filled with the idea of bringing about God's glory, of seeing the conquest of sin achieved through Christ. So all our strength, our mind, will be given over to the conquest of sin in ourselves, to the spreading of the Gospel to others, and to the binding up of the broken hearts of our brethren.

The preface to the good Samaritan parable is there in :27,28, about loving God with all our strength and our neighbour as ourself; and "this do, and you shall live" (eternally). To define this statement more closely, the Lord told the good Samaritan parable. "Go and do likewise" is referring back to :28, where the Lord commands the man "*this do*", i.e. loving God with all the heart, soul etc. So the example of the good Samaritan is a practical epitome of loving God with all the heart, soul etc.

To love our neighbour as ourself is to love God with all the heart and soul and strength and mind. Therefore the good Samaritan needs to represent us, although we are also the wounded man.

"Be going on, and do likewise", the Lord concluded (:37 YLT). Verse 38 appropriately continues: "Now it came to pass, *as they went*", in the same way as the Samaritan Saviour "as he journeyed" (:33) showed such energetic compassion, with all his heart and strength, to the stricken man. We must be able to use our own realization of our own desperate need for Christ's grace to motivate us to zealously devote ourselves to ministering to others. Our lack of zeal in this is largely due to our own failure to appreciate our own need, and the degree to which this has been satisfied by the Lord. He knew (and knows) the feelings of the stricken man.

Like most Jews, the Lord would have prayed the *shema* ("The Lord our God is one") upon rising and going to bed- just as He had a garment like that of the Pharisees, with the traditional tassels hanging from its edge (Mt. 9:20; 23:5). Yet He thought about what He prayed. When asked which was the greatest of the commandments, He replied that it was the fact that God is one. He saw the unity of God as a commandment that elicited action; and He says [note His grammar] that this plus the command to love our neighbour is the [singular] great commandment (Mk. 12:31). And He again combines these two commandments in Lk. 10:27,37, saying that to love God with all our heart is parallel with loving our neighbour and showing mercy to him. He quoted two commandments as one, so deeply had He perceived that we can't claim to love God without loving our brother. How had He worked that out? Perhaps by daily reflecting upon what to many was merely a ritual saying of words. And we too read and have pass our lips, ideas which can work radical transformation in us *if only we will put meaning into the words* and reflect upon them. He speaks of giving His *shalom* [peace] to us, not as the [Jewish] world gives it; each time He called out *shalom* across the street or to the guys at work each morning, He meant it. And He perceived that it would take His death on the cross to really achieve what He was giving to them in His words.

A feature we need to bear in mind with all the parables is the almost constant stress on the end of the story as the part which makes the main point which the Lord is seeking to get over. Likewise the emphasis is often upon the last person mentioned in the story, the last action, the last words. Think of the parable of the prodigal; or how the Samaritan, the last man on the scene, is the example for us. "Go and do likewise" (Lk. 10:37) invites us to go forth and be like the Lord Jesus in bringing salvation to others. Or the man who buried his talent and did nothing with it; the crux of the story is that indifference to our potential is *so awful*.

The parable of the sower focuses in the end on the good seed which brings a great harvest. The fact so much of the seed is lost is in itself an element of unreality- but the focus is on the fact that some seed brings forth wonderfully. And isn't this just the encouragement every preacher needs? That despite all the hard hearts, the initial responses that come to nothing, all is worth it because *someone* responds truly.

10:38 *Now as they went on their way, he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha welcomed him into her house-* This incident is recorded perhaps to demonstrate the outworking of 'going and doing likewise' in the preceding parable (:37). But the 'doing' was not doing works, but rather listening to the Lord's teaching of salvation by grace and believing it.

The parable of the good Samaritan features Jesus as the Samaritan helping the stricken man, representative of us all. However, the parable is followed immediately by the account of the Lord visiting the Bethany home of Martha and Mary. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho went via Bethany. The home where the sick man was taken was surely intended to be understood as that of Martha and Mary. The attacked man is called "a certain man", and then we read straight on that the Lord was entertained by "a certain woman", Martha (Lk. 10:30,38). The Samaritan "as he journeyed" came to the stricken man; and yet "as they went on their way, he entered into a certain village..." (Lk. 10:33,38). The Samaritan Jesus 'cared for him'; and yet Martha unkindly challenges the Lord 'Don't you care...?' (Lk. 10:35,40). The similarities aren't just co-incidence. Surely the Lord is teaching that whether or not Martha perceives it, she and Mary are actually the wounded man of the parable, and He is taking care of them, not vice versa as Martha thought, in the teaching He was giving them in their home. He was spiritually pouring in oil and wine. And yet Martha and Mary, especially in Martha's incomprehension of the Lord's spiritual and saving care for her, are set up as types of all of us who are saved and cared for in Christ.

The disciples literally did give up most of what they had and follow the Lord. And yet there were evidently others who responded to His teaching without doing this- Peter's family (Mk. 1:29); Mary and Martha (Lk. 10:38); Simon the leper Mk. 14:3). They made use of the Lord's concessions to human weakness.

10:39 *And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and heard his word-* See on 8:27. "Also sat" is a positive comment on Martha; despite her obsession with hospitality, she also loved the Lord's words and was His disciple- 'sitting at the feet' is an idiom for being a disciple of a rabbi. What is challenging is that many Jewish teachers considered it better for the Law to be burnt than to be taught to a woman. But the Lord taught women, as He did the Samaritan woman;

and Martha and Mary were also amongst those 'at His feet'. This again is typical of how Luke emphasizes the Lord's radical acceptance of women and the marginalized.

10:40 *But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said: Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me-* We can so easily be like Martha, "distracted" even by the secular dimension to our supposed service of the Lord. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "distracted" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time. We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

"Do you not care?" is the language of the distracted disciples in the boat at Mk. 4:38. His whole life and death were because He *did* so care that they would not perish (Jn. 3:16). It's so reminiscent of a child's total, if temporary, misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the parent's love and self-sacrifice. We note in Mk. 12:14 that the Lord was again accused there of 'not caring'. The most ultimately caring person was at times perceived as not caring; and when our care is ignored or misread, we can take comfort from this.

10:41 *But the Lord answered and said to her: Martha, Martha, you are anxious and disturbed about many things-* Nearly every one of the 19 occurrences of the Greek word for "anxious" is in the Lord's teachings *not* to take anxious thought but instead to focus upon the things of the Kingdom. The focus upon only "one thing" in life empowers us to handle the stress of "the many" secular things. Without that focus, life appears full of "many things" and the fact we cannot sufficiently multi-task leaves us stressed and distracted from that one thing which is needful.

10:42 *But one thing is needful. For Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her-* Martha was "anxious and disturbed about many things" (:41), but the Lord perceived that Mary was anxious and troubled about the "one thing" that was "needful"- and the context demands we understand this "one thing" as hearing the Lord's words. For her, as she sat there at His feet, it was an anxious and troubling experience. To hear the Lord's words is in this sense a troubling experience. Whilst we are saved by grace, the extent of the imperative within the Lord's teaching is without doubt 'troubling' to the sensitive believer in Him. For we cannot hear Him without perceiving the enormous imperative which there is within those words for the transformation of our human lives in practice. See on Phil. 4:6. The one thing that was needful is surely to be connected by the incident, also recorded by Luke, where the Lord tells the rich young man that he lacks "the one thing" (Lk.

18:22)- which in his case, was to give his wealth away. Yet Mary did this, when she poured out her life savings on the Lord's feet. Sitting at His feet, hearing His words, led her to anoint those feet. She chose "the one thing", of anxiously hearing His words, the lines in her forehead showing in intense concentration. And yet that learning of Him issued in something practical- she gave her life to Him in practice, by giving all she had to those feet. The rich young man lacked the one thing- for he was not then ready to give his life's wealth to the Lord. Moving the spotlight onto ourselves, we can hear, and yet do nothing. We can read our Bibles without the intensity of devotion which Mary had, and without there being any direct translation of what we hear and read into practice. We can be as the rich young man, intellectually impressed, and yet totally failing to accept the tremendous practical demands behind the most simple, basic teachings of the Lord.

Local Jewish culture stressed that the place of the woman was about domestic matters rather than spiritual ones. Yet in the incident of Martha and Mary, the Lord commended Mary for neglecting her domestic duties in order to concern herself with spiritual development. She sat at his feet, as if a student at the feet of a rabbi. As noted on :39, it's easy to forget that to sit at the feet of a Rabbi [and the Lord was called 'Rabbi'] meant to be a disciple of that Rabbi. And women... couldn't be disciples of a Rabbi. It was all radical stuff.

## CHAPTER 11

11:1 *And it came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place-* Perhaps Bethany, following on from the context of chapter 10. But we have the impression as in Mk. 1:36 of the disciples finding Him praying, in some secluded spot; and wishing to have that same intimacy with the Father which exuded from Him. The Comforter promises us that same relationship with God as Father which the Lord experienced; and so He teaches them in practice how to move towards it.

*That when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him: Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples-* This means that this teaching of prayer is different to that recorded in Matthew 6. It would seem therefore that He replies to their request to share His intimacy with the Father by repeating an earlier teaching which [like us] they had not given due attention to. They knew John had taught his disciples forms of prayer, and they wanted one. The Lord is reminding them that He actually had given them one, but they had not paid attention to it. Or it could be that because John's disciples were well known for their prayers (5:33), the disciples of the Lord wanted a different prayer to that which the Lord had given them, one more in line with common Jewish prayer forms. And the Lord replies by repeating the prayer He had originally taught them, which they apparently weren't satisfied with. Again we see their immaturity, chronicled by they themselves in these gospel records, as an encouragement to their hearers and readers to mature more quickly than they had.

The model prayer given by the Lord can of course be used just as it is. But it's worth noting that the Lord's own subsequent prayers, and some of Paul, repeated the essence of some of the phrases in it, but in different words. This may be a useful pattern for us in learning how to formulate prayers. There was therefore no need for Him to give another prayer. The prayer of Jesus in Jn. 17 is in some ways an expanded restatement of the model prayer. In it, the Lord asks for the Father's Name to be hallowed or glorified (Jn. 17:1,11,12); for His work or will to be done or finished (Jn. 17:4); for deliverance from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). The prayer of Jn. 17 can be divided into three units of about the same length (Jn. 17:1-8; 9-19; 20-26). Each has the theme of glory, of directly addressing the Father, and of the needs of God's people- all clearly taken from the model prayer.

11:2 *And he said to them: When you pray, say, Father-* The model prayer begins with the words "Our Father" (AV, textus receptus). Straight away we are bidden remember that no man is an island; the Lord intended us to be aware of the entire community of believers in our private prayers.

His teaching about our having a *Heavenly* Father (AV) may appear quite painless to accept; but it was radical, demanding stuff in the first century.

The family then was "the centrally located institution maintaining societal existence... it [was] the primary focus of personal loyalty and it [held] supreme sway over individual life". "Our father, *who is in Heaven*" was a prayer hard to pray if one really accepted the full import of the words; every bit as much as it is today. The idea of belonging to another family, of which the invisible Lord Jesus in Heaven was the head, belonging to a new society of world-wide brothers and sisters, where the Lord from Heaven held "supreme sway over individual life", was radical indeed. It took huge commitment and a deep faith in this invisible head of the new family to step out from ones existing family. And the call of Christ is no less radical today. The social circle at uni, the guys at work, our unbelieving family members... now all take a radical second place to our precious family in Christ. And yet we so easily abuse or disregard the importance of our spiritual family; we too easily exclude them, won't meet with them, can't be bothered about them.

*Hallowed be your name*- Hallowed / sanctified be Your name" uses an aorist tense which implies that it will be accomplished as a one-time act; at the coming of the Lord. Indeed, the aorist tenses in the Lord's model prayer are arresting; each phrase of the prayer asks for something to be done in a one-time sense. This alone suggests an intended 'answer' in terms of the final establishment of the Kingdom. "Hallowed be Your Name" was actually one of the Eighteen Benedictions used by most Jews at the time. This common phrase was consciously seen as a reference to the YHWH Name (Hal Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: The Polebridge Press, 1999) p. 76). But the Lord purposefully juxtaposes *Abba*, "Father", with that phrase. This Aramaic, non-Hebrew, familiar word, an equivalent of "Daddy!", is placed by the Lord next to Judaism's most well known and frequently used blessing of the YHWH Name. By doing so, He was making the Name even more hallowed and glorious- by showing that the essence of that Name speaks of familiar family relationship with us, and is no longer the carefully guarded preserve of Hebrew people, thought, culture and language. The Lord prayed this in Gethsemane; and it took Him so long to say these words that the disciples fell asleep.

*Your kingdom come*- It has been pointed out that "Your Kingdom come!" was violently in conflict with the Roman view that the lives of a subject people like Israel belonged to Caesar's kingdom. "'Your kingdom come!' is therefore a word of defiance; to pray it is a subversive activity. This is also how the authorities understand the ministry of Jesus: it is subversive and not to be tolerated". And so with us, the seeking of the future Kingdom is a radical denial of the spirit of our age, which seeks its Kingdom now; it demands a separation from the world around us. The well known description of the Kingdom in Is. 2:1-4 is in the context of appealing to Israel to change their ways. Because they would *then* walk in the ways of the Lord, therefore "O house of Israel [therefore] Come ye

[now] and walk in the ways of the Lord" (Is. 2:5). The hope of Israel ought to motivate Israel to live the Kingdom life here and now.

Greek scholars have pointed out that some phrases in the Lord's prayer show a remarkable lack of etiquette and the usual language of petition to a superior; literally, the text reads: "Come Your Kingdom, done Your will". Is this part of the "boldness" in approaching God which the NT speaks of? That God should encourage us in this (although He also encourages us in reverential fear of Him) reflects something of His humility. The Kingdom of God refers to that over which God reigns. We are "a colony of Heaven" in our response to His principles (Phil. 3:20 Moffat). We are to pray for His Kingdom to come, so that His will may be done on earth (Mt. 6:10). The Kingdom and the doing of His will are therefore paralleled. His Kingdom reigns over all in Heaven, for there, all the Angels are obedient to Him (Ps. 103:19-21). By praying for the Kingdom to come on earth we are not only praying for the Lord's second coming, but for the progress of the Gospel world-wide right now. Not only that more men and women will hear it and respond, but that those who have accepted it might work God's will rather than their own to an ever-greater extent. Whether or not we can physically spread the Gospel is in this sense irrelevant; our prayer should be, first and foremost if the pattern of the Lord's prayer is to be taken exactly, for the triumph of the Gospel world-wide. It has been pointed out by Philip Yancey that "Thy Kingdom come!" was violently in conflict with the Roman view that the lives of a subject people like Israel belonged to Caesar's kingdom.

"Your kingdom come!" is therefore a word of defiance; to pray it is a subversive activity. This is also how the authorities understand the ministry of Jesus: it is subversive and not to be tolerated" (Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Harper Collins, 1998). The word *basileia* translated "Kingdom" definitely brought to mind the imperial reign or empire of Rome. Thus Hal Taussig comments: "Whenever anyone in Jesus' time used the term "basileia", the first thing people thought of was the Roman "kingdom" or "empire". That is, "basileia" really meant "Roman empire" to most people who heard it... It was to many ears a direct insult to the Roman empire. Uttered in the presence of Roman soldiers, such a prayer could have gotten [a person] in immediate trouble" (Hal Taussig, *op cit* pp. 21,96). And so with us, the seeking of the future Kingdom is a radical denial of the spirit of our age, which seeks its Kingdom now; it demands a separation from the world around us. The well-known description of the Kingdom in Is. 2:1-4 is in the context of appealing to Israel to change their ways. Because they would *then* walk in the ways of the Lord, therefore "O house of Israel [therefore] Come ye [now] and walk in the ways of the Lord" (2:5). The hope of Israel ought to motivate Israel to live the Kingdom life here and now.

11:3 *Give us day by day our daily bread*- This may appear hard for comfortably off Christians to pray- until they grasp that they are praying for "our" daily bread, not "my" daily bread. There are so many in the brotherhood for whom having daily bread is indeed a constantly uncertain question. We should be aware of the whole brotherhood; and pray that "we" will be given our bread for today.

This has long been recognized as an inadequate translation of a very strange Greek phrase. The adjective *epiousios* in "our daily bread" is one example of Christ's radical use of language; there in the midst of the prayer which the Lord bid His followers constantly use, was a word which was virtually unknown to them. Our bread only-for-this-day was the idea; the word is used for the rations of soldiers. The idea is 'Give us today, right now, the bread / food of tomorrow'. In ancient Judaism, *mahar* means not only tomorrow but the great Tomorrow, i.e. the Kingdom. Jesus spoke of the inauguration of the future Kingdom in terms of eating food together (Mt. 8:11; Lk. 6:21; 14:15; 22:29,30; Rev. 7:16). 'Give us the future Kingdom today, may it come right now' is perhaps one of the levels on which He intended us to understand the prayer. The aorist implies: 'Give us this once and final time' the bread of tomorrow. The Lord was surely alluding to the way that Israel in the wilderness had been told that "in the morning [tomorrow] you shall be filled with bread"; and this was widely understood in first century Palestine as being typical of the coming of Messiah's Kingdom. Notice too how Is. 55:10 connects the descent of God's word made flesh in Jesus, with the giving of bread. And one practical point. Even though we may have daily bread, we are still to pray for it. It's rather like Zech. 10:1: "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain"; even when it's the season, still ask Him for what it appears you naturally already have. Israel were fed with manna one day at a time- this is so stressed (Ex. 16:4,19,20).

The idea of 'daily bread' recalls the gift of manna. There was to be no hoarding of manna- anything extra was to be shared with others (Ex. 16:8; 2 Cor. 8:15). But we live in a world where the financial challenges of retirement, housing, small family size [if any family at all]... mean that there appears no other option but to 'hoard manna' for the future. To some extent this may be a reflection of the way that life in these very last days is indeed quite different to anything previously known in history; but all the same, we face a very real challenge. Are we going to hoard manna, for our retirement, for our unknown futures? Or will we rise up to the challenge to trust in God's day by day provision, and share what's left over? "Give us this day our bread-for-today" really needs to be prayed by us daily. Let's give full weight to the Lord's command to pray for only "our daily bread", the daily rations granted to a soldier on active duty. It's almost impossible to translate this term adequately in English. In the former USSR and Communist East Germany (DDR), there was the idea

that nobody in a Socialist state should go hungry. And so if you were hungry in a restaurant after eating, you had the right to ask for some food, beyond what you paid for. In the former East Germany, the term *Sättigungsbeilage* was used for this in restaurants- the portion of necessity. It's this food we should ask God for- the food to keep us alive, the food which a Socialist restaurant would give you for free. We shouldn't be thinking in terms of anything more than this. It's an eloquent essay in what our attitude to wealth, materialism and long term self-provision ought to be.

To steal is to take the Name of Yahweh called upon us in vain (Prov. 30:9), and therefore we ask to be given *only* our daily bread and no more (NIV); not so much that if we are found out, the Name will be brought into disrepute, but rather that we personally will have blasphemed the imperative of Yahweh which is heavy upon us; these words of Agur are applied to us here.

11:4 *And forgive us our sins. For we ourselves also forgive everyone that is indebted to us. And bring us not into temptation-* There is a parallel between "sins" and being "indebted"; probably an allusion to the jubilee. We release / forgive men their debt to us, as God does to us. If we chose not to participate in this Jubilee by not releasing others, then we cannot expect to receive it ourselves (note the Jubilee allusions in Lk. 24:47). Around 90% of Old Testament references to sin use the metaphor of a weight or burden, which can be lifted by forgiveness. The Lord Jesus prefers to speak of sin as a debt, which can be forgiven by not being demanded and the debt erased. The metaphor of debt is somewhat richer than that of burdens. It opens the possibility that God lent to us, that He allowed us to get into that debt- because He didn't strike us dead for the sin. 'Debt' also carries with it the idea that we would like to repay, but cannot. This is the flavour of the Lord's opening to the Sermon- that He is the solution for those who would like to be spiritual but feel unable to be as they would wish to be (see on Mt. 5:6). The release of debt carries with it a greater sense of gratitude, knowing that we should not have got into the debt in the first place. All this was foreseen by the Lord in His change of metaphor from sin as weight to sin as debt. It has been noted that sin was not spoken as debt until Jesus introduced the idea. We are in debt to God. And yet so many have the idea that God owes them, and big time. The prayer of Apollonius of Tyana was that "O ye gods, give me the things which are owing to me". And that ancient attitude is alive today, leading to some who think it is their right not to work and to be supported, or expect some kind of material blessing from God. When actually, we are in deep debt to God, and forgiven it only by pure grace.

Those "indebted" to us are those who have a debt to us. But Biblically, who are those who are 'indebted'? The same Greek word occurs often in the New Testament. Mt. 18:30 explains that there is a debt to us if we have been sinned against and it's not been reconciled. The debt our brethren have to us, and we to them, is to love one another, to lay our lives down for each other, to entertain and receive each other at home (s.w. 3 Jn. 8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:11). A wife has her husband in her debt if he doesn't love her with the love of Christ (Eph. 5:28); our brethren are in debt to us if they don't give us material help when we truly need it (Rom. 15:27); or if they don't wash our feet (Jn. 13:14). A debt implies that it's not been paid; and so I come to the conclusion that the *forgiveness* of our debtors is forgiving our brethren when they don't love us as they should, don't care for us... and never apologize or rectify it. The debt is outstanding; they've not cleared it. But we are to forgive it; we are to forgive unconditionally, without demanding restoration or grovelling repentance before us. This is the challenge of that phrase in the Lord's prayer. For we ask for "our sins" in general to be likewise forgiven; and they surely include many 'secret sins' which we don't even perceive or haven't repented of. And further. "As we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Lk. 11:4) can actually be read as a word of command, a statement that is actually a request. The request is that the sins of those who've sinned against us be forgiven- in this sense, "whosoever sins ye remit [s.w. forgive] they are remitted unto them" (Jn. 20:23). That's another challenging thought. If they're impenitent, how can they be forgiven? But if we forgive them, perhaps we are to understand that God is happy to forgive them. If we feel, as I do, that we've been sinned against so much... then we have a wonderful opportunity to gain our own forgiveness and even that of those people... by forgiving them. The more I hurt at how others have treated me, the more I realize my own desperate need for forgiveness. The two things, as the Lord foresaw in His model prayer, dovetail seamlessly together.

Further evidence that Jesus prayed in Aramaic is found by comparing the two records of the Lord's prayer; Matthew has "forgive us our debts", whilst Luke has "forgive us our sins". The Aramaic word *hobha* means both 'sin' and 'debt'. The conclusion is therefore that Jesus taught the disciples to pray in their native Aramaic dialect rather than in Hebrew or Greek. Further, the Lord's prayer has many links to the *Kaddish*, an ancient Aramaic prayer which included phrases like "Exalted and hallowed be his great name... may he let his kingdom rule... speedily and soon".

"As we..." is a challenge. The crucial little Greek word *hos* is elsewhere translated: according as, as soon as, even as, like as, as greatly as, since, whenever, while. Clearly enough, our forgiveness by God is dependent upon and of the same nature as our forgiveness of others.

"Forgive us our / debts sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us" uses the aorist which implies 'Forgive us this once'. Could this not be

an anticipation of the state of the believer before the judgment seat of Christ- 'forgive me please this once for all my sins, as I have forgiven those who sinned against me'. If so, we have a powerful exhortation to forgive *now*; for in that awesome moment, it will be so apparent that the Lord's gracious acceptance of us will be directly proportional to how deeply we accepted and forgave our brethren in this life. Notice how strongly Jesus links future judgment with our present forgiveness (Lk. 6:37). He teaches us to pray now for forgiveness on the basis of how we have forgiven others, knowing that in prayer, we have a foretaste of the judgment. Now we can come boldly before the throne of grace in prayer, just as we will come before that same throne in the last day.

11:5 *And he said to them: Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight and say to him: Friend, lend me three loaves-* A man finds a friend comes to him at midnight, wanting food. So he goes to *his* friend, notwithstanding the inconvenient hour, and asks for some loaves, but actually he's given whatever he wants. His want, his will, was to find sustenance for his friend / brother. And therefore his friend gives abundantly above all he asks or thinks, indeed, whatever he wants is provided. The promise of boundless response to prayer is therefore true, but in the context of seeking to help others. This parable comes straight after 'the Lord's prayer'. In Matthew's record, the prayer is followed by a reminder that we must forgive our brother, if we are to be forgiven (Mt. 6:14,15). So perhaps the friend coming to the man at midnight starving hungry, represents a brother sinning against us. Our response must be to go to the Father in prayer and seek forgiveness / spiritual food for our brother. And in that context, we will be given whatever we desire. Note that banging on the shut door is elsewhere a symbol of asking for forgiveness (Lk. 13:24,25; Mt. 25:10).

The parable of the man coming to his friend at midnight and asking for loaves (Lk. 11:5-13) occurred in the context of the Lord's teaching about forgiveness (see the parallel Gospels). Yet the terms of the parable are replete with reference to the Lord's return and judgment:

11:5 At midnight- the Lord comes "at midnight" in other parables (cp. Mk. 13:35)

11:7 Door now shut- the door is shut on those rejected, never to be opened (Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25)

11:9 Knocking on the door in prayer, and the door is opened- the rejected knock on the door but it isn't opened.

Now, in this life, we knock on the door, knowing we are condemned, needing forgiveness, living out the situation of the rejected at the last day. But *now*, the door is opened. We are granted as much forgiveness as we need, which we accept shamefacedly and awkwardly, as the man receiving loaves at midnight for the visitor [note how Nathan describes David's lust for Bathsheba as a visitor arriving needing feeding].

The parable of the friend at midnight uses an element of unreality, but in a reverse way. The Lord paints the picture of a guest coming to a person who has no bread, and so they go and disturb their neighbour at midnight, asking for bread. The Middle Eastern peasant who appreciated the huge burden of responsibility to give food to a visitor would say that no, he couldn't possibly imagine that the person who was asked for food would say 'No'. He would not only give bread, but whatever was needed. And so it is with God. It's unthinkable, as unthinkable as it is in a Palestinian village to not be hospitable, that our Father will not answer a prayer for resources with which to help others. This has been my own experience time and again. And further, the villager would respond not just because it is his neighbour asking him, but because he realizes that the responsibility to entertain the needy person actually falls upon the whole community. And God too sees our requests for others as partly His personal and communal responsibility. However let it be noted that the poor neighbour asks only for bread- for the very bare minimum with which to provide for the need of another. And the richer neighbour responds with far more. Again, a pattern for our own prayers for resources with which to help others.

11:6 *For a friend of mine has arrived from a journey and I have nothing to set before him-* Perhaps those not from an Eastern background can never understand the pressing urgency of the hospitality culture; you *must* feed the visitor. It just has to be done. But he is poor, and he doesn't have any bread. So, he goes to his richer friend, friend number three, and wakes him up, disturbing the whole household, to ask him to give him some bread with which to entertain the first friend.

The friend who came on his journey with "nothing" is intended by the Lord to be understood primarily as referring to the disciples whom He had sent out on their journey with nothing ("take nothing for your journey", Lk. 9:3). When He told them to "eat such things as are set before you" (Lk. 10:8), He didn't just mean 'Don't be picky about your food'. He used the same word in Lk. 11:6 to describe how the faithful friend "set [food] before" his visitor. As they travelled around, the disciples were to be received in the way He was describing. Those in that early brotherhood of believers who received and supported them were to do so knowing that these brethren were in their turn responding to human need, and they could be fellow-helpers in the Gospel's work by showing hospitality. John says just the same: "Because that for his name's sake they went forth [alluding to the great commission to go into all the world], taking nothing *of the Gentiles* [i.e. the unbelievers]. We therefore ought to help receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth" (3 Jn. 7,8).

Does the 'traveller' needing sustenance of Lk. 11:6 refer to our sinful tendencies, in the light of 2 Sam. 12:4? Heb. 5:2 describes those in sin

whom the Lord saved as "out of the way". The same idea is found in Lk. 11:6 AVmg., where the man "out of his way" comes knocking on the Lord's door. The image of the shut door is that of rejection; but here the door is opened, and the man given "as much as he needs" of forgiveness and acceptance.

11:7 *And he from within shall answer and say-* "From within" is always used in the Bible about the inner man, rather than meaning indoors. The Greek word occurs twice in the same context: "your *inward part...* that which is *within*" (11:39,40). Inside himself, he spoke to his friend: "Trouble me not". Yet that satan within him, that desire to be selfish, was overcome by his realization of his friends need, and *why* it had arisen. And if we have this same emboldened conscience to overcome our innate selfishness and ask of our Father *for the sake of others*, then we will see the work of the ministry will be provided by Him- that is His sober promise. Jn. 15:16 is one of John's versions of the great preaching commission: " I chose you and appointed you, that ye should *go* and bear fruit...whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you". The promise of support and help and answered prayer is again held out- in the context of preaching and ministering to the Gospel.

*Do not trouble me! The door is now shut and my children are with me in bed, I cannot rise and give anything to you?*- This gives further insight into how prayer is heard- the householder, God, is in His house (Heaven) with the door shut and his children with him in bed, and in order to get up- corresponding to God answering our prayer in the parable- the *whole* household, the children of God (a description of the Angels- Luke 20:35,36 etc.), have to be roused. Thus all the Angels are conscious of one specific action on our behalf. See on Lk. 15:6.

The man who knocks is answered, the Lord taught. He may have meant that all true prayer is answered in its essence, rather than its particularities. But for our purposes we note that the first knocks weren't heard. Only by continual knocking was the request responded to. And so "knock, and it shall be opened" doesn't just mean 'ask for something and you'll get it'. The first knocks produced nothing. It surely means 'Keep on and on knocking, driven to your utmost desperation and entreaty; *this* is what I call knocking'.

The Lord will one day come to *us* at midnight, and the unworthy will not open to Him (Song 5). And He right now stands at the door and knocks (Rev. 3:20). The rejected will know what it is like to stand knocking at the Lord's shut door and be unanswered (Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25). He surely intended us to make such links within His teachings. The message is quite clear- those who can't be bothered to respond to the knocking of others, who refuse to feel for others in their desperation... these are the ones who will then come to know just how that feels, as in ultimate spiritual desperation *they* hammer at the Lord's door. From this it surely follows

that in our response to the desperation of others, we are working out our own eternal destiny. We are deciding whether or not the Lord will respond *to us*, as we lay there prostrate before Him at judgment, knowing our desperation whilst at the same time believing and hoping in His love and response. When we see others in their needs, the sister who can't get to meeting because nobody will baby-sit for her once in a while, the brother who just needs someone to talk to, someone to listen, an evening of someone's time, the man over there who is so lost in his Catholicism, that guy so addicted to his dreams of personal wealth, the woman back there hooked on dope, the single father with two spastic children, the grandmother left to bring up three children on a tiny pension in one room with broken windows and severe winters, the refugees streaming over that border day after day... we are confronted with these pictures daily.

They are knocking at our door, at midnight. And we would rather not be disturbed. We would rather acknowledge their status as our friends, our brothers and sisters, but make excuses as to why here and now we can't respond. To tell the friend that, well, give him bread tomorrow...this was quite inappropriate. It could have been argued that they didn't *need* bread right then. They could wait till morning. But the friend appreciated the *shame* and the *awkwardness* of his friend...his heart felt for him, and he responded. It isn't just dire material need we should feel for, therefore; but feel for others in the sheer humanity of their life situations, and have a heart willing to try to give them all they need in them.

11:8 *I say to you, though he will not want to rise and give anything to him, yet because he is his friend, and because of the man's persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs-* The knocking on the door is specifically a symbol of prayer. If we see our brothers need, even if we can do nothing physically to help (and so often, we can't); we will *pray* earnestly for them. If we truly feel for them, we will pray for them. The friend troubles his friend for help (Lk. 18:7), just as in another parable about prayer the desperate widow "troubles" the judge for a response (Lk. 18:5).

The poor neighbour asks with "importunity" (AV)- with shamelessness. He is confident of being heard and has no shame or hesitation to his request because he knows he really does have nothing to give the visitor. This is of course the prerequisite for prayer which will be heard. The Lord drives the point home that whoever asks in this way, receives. And yet the Lord addresses this comment to those who although "evil", knew how to give gifts to their kids. Surely the Lord was speaking to the Pharisees present, who prayed regularly. Perhaps He is saying that they had never really prayed the prayer of earnest desire, motivated by others' needs.

Because of his "importunity", the rich friend gave to him. The Greek translated "importunity" means lack of shamefacedness, lack of

reverence. The Greek word is *an-aidēia*: without *aidos*. What does *aidos* mean? It is used twice in the New Testament: in 1 Tim. 2:9 "shamefacedness", and in Heb. 12:28 "serve God acceptably with *reverence*". The man (who the Lord invites us to see as representing us) comes to the rich friend (cp. God) *wit out* this reverence. Now of course we should serve our God with appropriate reverence. But there ought to be times when we as it were rush to God, because He is our father and our friend, without that formality which our worship of Him might more usually include. Contrary to the ideas of popular religion, God is not merely something to be worshipped; He is Father and friend, the one to run to in time of urgent need *when that need arises from the requirements of His people and His work*.

Paul's writings are packed with allusions back to the Lord's parables. In his reference to the tale of the three friends, Paul seems to have understood just as we have done. Rom. 16:1,2 comments that the ecclesia should welcome "Phoebe our sister receive her in the Lord, as becomes saints, and that you assist her in whatever business she *has need* of you: for she has been a succourer of many". "Has need" is the same Greek word as in Lk. 11:8- the friend gave whatever *was needed* to the friend who arrived from his journey. And Paul says this should be done for Phoebe because she lived a life of giving out to others needs.

11:9 *And I say to you: Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you-* Jesus likens requesting things from God to a man asking a favour of his friend at midnight (Lk. 11:5,9). We are to see God as *our friend* to whom like Abraham, we respectfully and rather awkwardly present ourselves. And He sees us as *His* friends. There's a wonderful mutuality between a man and his God. As noted above, the guaranteed answer of prayers refers to the requests we make for others when we truly do not have the resources to provide for them. And this is true in spiritual terms; for so often we feel utterly lacking in ability to provide for the spiritual needs of those who come to us at midnight.

The connections with the Sermon on the Mount surely send us back to Mt. 5:42 "Give to him that asks". The same Greek words are used. Our responsiveness to others will be reflected in God's responsiveness to us. And yet the Lord's style throughout the sermon is to elevate the natural onto a higher, spiritual plane. This is not a blank cheque promise, as is clear from both personal experience and Bible teaching. What we can be utterly assured of being given is God's grace and salvation. The Lord surely foresaw that the initial mental objection to His words would be 'But that's not true! I don't get everything I ask for, and neither did many Bible characters!'. But He wanted us to therefore think further as to what He might be really saying- and what He is saying is that forgiveness and

salvation will surely be given to whoever asks. These things are summarized in Mt. 7:11 as God for sure giving "good things to them that ask Him". The parallel here in Lk. 11:13 summarizes those "good things" as "the Holy Spirit".

11:10 *For everyone that asks receives*- Passages like this can be read to teach that every one who seeks in prayer, receives. This just isn't true in terms of the words of our actual requests being answered. But once we understand that God sees the spirit behind our words and answers this rather than the specific request, then these promises become more realistically believable; and the entire context is about asking for loaves for our needy visitor which we truly do not have to give him.

*And he that seeks finds*- As David "found" God through experiencing His forgiveness, so can "every one that is Godly" today (Ps. 32:6). It is quite possible that "seek and you shall find" was uttered by the Lord with his mind on Ps. 32:6 and David's experience. After all, we cannot expect this to be a blank cheque offer, that whatever we seek for we must receive. But if these words are an allusion to David's seeking and finding forgiveness in Ps. 32:6, then the promise is more realistic. If we seek for forgiveness and a living relationship with God, then we have this unconditional promise that we *will* find this. Yet in a sense, the time when we will ultimately find God will be at the judgment: we will "find mercy of the Lord in that day" (2 Tim. 1:18), so that "ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:14). We will find God, as He will find us, in that great moment of consummation; "for then shall (we) know (God), even as also (we) are known" by Him (1 Cor. 13:12;). Then we will "be *found* in him... that I may (then) *know* him" (Phil. 3:9,10). Yet David says that after forgiveness, we can find and know God. It is as if whenever we sin, we in a sense face our judgment seat. And the knowledge and 'finding' of God which we will then enjoy should be prefigured in our present experience of forgiveness. Should we not therefore pray for forgiveness with the intensity with which we would at the judgment, if we were then offered the chance to do so?

The 'seeking' which is in view is clearly of spiritual things. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord had used the same word in encouraging us to above all "seek the Kingdom of God" (Mt. 6:33). And now He is encouraging us that if we seek it, we will 'find' it- the word for "find" is elsewhere translated "obtain". If we really want the things of the Kingdom and to eternally be in that environment- we will be. The Lord Jesus Himself went out seeking for goodly pearls- and found them (Mt. 13:45,46). He goes seeking His sheep- and finds it (Mt. 18:12,13). He "found" faith in a Gentile (Mt. 8:10), He was as the woman who sought and found her precious coin (Lk. 15:8,9). Our seeking the things of the

Kingdom is therefore not merely our personal seeking a place in its future establishment upon earth. We can seek the progress of the Kingdom principles which comprise the reign and kingship of God on earth right now. Part of that is in seeking men and women to submit to that Kingship / Kingdom. And that too shall ultimately succeed, as the Lord Jesus demonstrated in His own life despite so many setbacks and failures in response to Him. 'But nobody's interested!' is really the cry of unbelief in this promise. If we are seeking for men and women to submit to the things of God's Kingdom, then we shall find them- even if they may not join our denomination or agree totally with all of our theology.

*And to him that knocks it shall be opened-* This is the language of preaching. For Paul appears to allude to it three times in speaking of how doors of opportunity have been opened for him in the work of the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). The implication is surely that he had knocked in prayer, and the doors had been opened. If we pray for opportunities to preach, to save people (rather than spending our mental energy on condemning our brethren), then God will respond. According to our principle of letting the Sermon interpret itself, it may be that the idea of the door being opened looks back to Mt. 6:6- in prayer, we are to shut our door and pray. And our knocking means that the door is opened. The particular metaphor of knocking upon a door and it being opened is used in Lk. 12:36 about the Lord knocking on our door at the second coming, and us opening; yet He stands today and knocks at the door, and we are to open to Him (Rev. 3:20). The point is surely that our relationship with Him is mutual, we knock and He opens, He knocks and we open. And at the last day, tragically too late, the rejected knock and the door will not be opened to them (Lk. 13:25). Their knocking is a desperate plea for salvation. But if we ask for it in this life- we shall receive it. So the metaphor speaks of seeking salvation and a relationship with the Lord in this life, but in context of the rest of the verse it also refers to our desire for others to have the door opened to them. John's equivalent to all this is perhaps His description of the Lord Jesus as the door, through whom any man may enter in to salvation. It's the same idea- the door is easily opened in this life, indeed the implication is that Jesus is effectively an open door for all who believe in Him.

The language of knocking and opening is used in other parables about spiritual acceptance with the Lord; it is this which He is also willing to provide us with, for others' sake.

11:11 *What father among you-* We can imagine Him looking around at them.

*If his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a snake?-* The Lord sensed that His promise of Divine response to prayer for salvation would be so hard for them to accept. He is here persuading them by all manner of methods to simply accept that reality. We are God's children, and He

will not be cruel to us. It would be unnatural and counter-instinctive for Him to not save us. For His is the Kingdom- therefore He desires to give it to us, He designed it for us.

There were some fish (similar to eels) caught in the sea of Galilee which looked like snakes. The Lord is penetrating deep into the psychology of His people. We fear that the promised salvation may only be an appearance. And we are being shown here that that is to effectively accuse God of a cruel trick. At what stage the fish became a symbol of Christianity is not clear (there is a distinct similarity in sound between the Aramaic for 'Jesus' and for 'fish', something like 'Iisus' and 'Ikfus'), but the combination of fish and serpent tempt us to interpret this as also having the sense: Do you think that Christianity, the whole offer of the Kingdom I am making, is really such a cruel trick that it's really the serpent, the symbol of evil incarnate? Because that really is how it would have to be. It's either that, or gloriously true. And if we accept God as our loving Father, then with childlike faith we must also believe that His offer of salvation is simply true for us- if we ask. Again we see a connection with earlier teaching in the Sermon; for the Lord had taught His people to pray to "Our Father". Like all of the Lord's prayer, that is harder to pray than might first appear. Because if He really is our loving Heavenly Father, then we are to believe that if we ask Him for salvation and the things of His Kingdom, we shall surely receive.

11:12 *Or if he shall ask for an egg, will he give him a scorpion?*- See on :11. Eggs and small scorpions could look similar. But in the life of a mature believer, there is no possible doubt that every gift from the Father is good- ultimately. Our environments are all given us by Him to develop our spirituality, and not because He hates us or wishes us to suffer. The song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5 makes the amazing point that the Father does all things possible so that we might bear fruit.

11:13 *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?*- See on Mt. 7:11. Quite simply, we have to believe that prayer changes things. God can change the course of a nation's destiny, or even in a sense the whole course of the universe, because some finite, ignorant, sinful human being has the neck to fervently ask Him to. We are encouraged by the Lord to persist in prayer (Lk. 11:5-13). Elijah had to pray for rain seven times before the cloud came. Daniel prayed 21 days before an answer came. Why doesn't God answer immediately? Is it not simply because He sees it is for our good to develop this habit of knocking on Heaven's door with the same request?

The power of spiritual victory, the real way to holiness in practice, a spiritual mind, unity through forgiveness with God's mind / spirit, is assured to those who simply ask for it in faith. Seeking and finding, knocking on the door and it being opened, are likewise metaphors

elsewhere used for God's assured positive response to our spiritual requests. John's equivalent to this part of the Sermon is perhaps the Lord's assurance that He will definitely *give* "living water" to whoever *asks* Him (Jn. 4:10); and the frequent references to us being given "the Holy Spirit" or whatever we ask in His Name if it results in the Father being glorified (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24,26). The letter of James is full of reference to the Sermon, and his allusion to 'ask and you will be given' is that if any man ask for *wisdom*, he will be given it (James 1:5,6), but a man will *not* be given things if he asks for material things to fulfil his own natural desires (James 4:2,3). It's as if James is answering the primitive objection: 'Jesus said if you ask, you will be given- but I asked for stuff and never got it'. And his answer is that the blank cheque promise is obviously about asking for spiritual things, not material things. 1 Jn. 3:22; 5:14,15 likewise speak of receiving whatever we ask- in the context of saying that we can look forward to the day of judgment and be confident of acceptance there. God is willing and eager to save us, as the whole wonder of the crucifixion makes clear. If we ask for forgiveness, salvation and the strength to be spiritual, then He has promised to give those things to us. The wonder of that means that any attempt to try to as it were extort material blessing from God is sadly inappropriate and will not enter the mind of those who are rejoicing in His salvation.

11:14 *And he was casting out a demon that was dumb. And it came to pass, when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke-* This is the language used at the time for explaining medical situations which today we would diagnose differently. Blindness (Mt.) and deafness are explicable in medical terms. The verse states that the Lord 'healed' the man and therefore, because of that healing, the blindness (Mt.) and deafness left him. The language of healing of persons is not what we would expect if the Lord instead engaged in battle with demonic entities in Heaven or at least, outside of the man.

*And the crowds marvelled-* This is a strong word, meaning utterly astonished, and even used about madness (Mk. 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:13).

11:15 *But some of them said-* The Pharisees (Mt.). Their comment appears to have been made in very hot blood, for it was logically contradictory to claim that someone who cast out demons must therefore be in league with the prince of the demons; because their own sons (either literally or in the sense of their disciples) claimed to cast out demons. And if Jesus was actually on the side of the prince of demons, why then was he as it were fighting for the other side by casting out demons. Such gaping error in logic was exactly what the Pharisees were constantly careful to avoid; but their intense jealousy of the Lord led them to make this logical error. Again we note that the Lord's style was not so much to directly state the errors of his opponents, but to work on the assumption that their beliefs were correct- and to then follow those

beliefs to their logical conclusions, thus showing how those positions contradicted themselves to the point they could not be true. This is one explanation for the use of the language of demons in the Gospels, even though demons don't in fact exist.

*By Beelzebub the prince of the demons he casts out demons-* By the instrumentality of Beelzebub. They were driven to assume that the Lord was in league with some higher power in order to perform His miracles. If it wasn't the Holy Spirit of God- it had to be by some other power, and the only option in their theology was some form of the Satan myth. Their logical desperation is a reflection of the undeniable nature of the Lord's miracles (as in Acts 4:16). Any who claim to be able to do miracles through the Holy Spirit should likewise be producing healings which even their most sceptical opponents cannot deny are miracles; but that feature is not seen in many claims of healings today. When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than Satan (cp. Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'Satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan "has an end" (Mk. 3:26). His approach was 'OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that's the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That's the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed 'binding the strong man', rendering Satan powerless, making him 'have an end', and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is powerless and not an item now'. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: "If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] 'Beelzebub', how much more shall they call them of his household?" [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn't *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn't make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms. Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled 'Satan' were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of

'Satan'. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: "Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah" (*Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen*). It's been suggested that the way the Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression *yemach shemo vezichro*– "May his name and memory be obliterated"). This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They saw Jesus as Satan himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally 'the lord of the house'; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal 'Satan'. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the "strong man" – the Devil – was really to show that the "Devil" as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn't use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called "the Devil" as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial ['satanic'] position to Jesus.

*Archon*, "the first" ["prince"], would imply that Beelzebub was also a demon, the "first" or leading one. Thus the fallacy of their argument is the more apparent- if Beelzebub really existed, why would he cast out his own fellow demons?

11:16 *And others, testing him, sought from him a sign from heaven-* They considered this to be a sign connected with the 'devil'. The Lord could have just walked away from such obvious blasphemers. But He works with them from whatever position they stated, and thereby sets us a huge challenge in dealing with difficult folks.

11:17 *But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them-* But they had "said" these things (:15). Perhaps they said these things within their own minds. Or maybe the contrast is to highlight the upcoming teaching that thoughts are as good as words (Mt. 12:34-37). To hear their words was to know their thoughts.

*Every kingdom-* Again the Lord accepts their position for one moment as true, and yet takes it forward to its logical implication. If Beelzebub was fighting against his own side, then all the same, Satan's Kingdom was divided against itself and would soon crumble into self-destruction. Therefore what Jesus had done ought to be seen as a presage of Satan's Kingdom ending and, by implication, the soon triumph of God's Kingdom.

*Divided against itself-* The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 13:6)- as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom.

*Is brought to desolation-* The Lord only uses the Greek word elsewhere with regard to latter day Babylon's destruction as a result of her followers rising up against her (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). This typically been how God destroyed Israel's enemies in the Old Testament- by them turning upon themselves. It follows another great Biblical theme- that those who ultimately will be condemned are in practice self-condemned and bring about their own condemnation.

*And a family divided against a family falls apart-* A divided house is the characteristic of Satan's house or kingdom, and it will fall- just as the house built on sand fell at the day of judgment. This is the strongest condemnation of any divided Christian community. The Lord is teaching that the breakup of a Kingdom, even Satan's, must start on the household level and progress higher. Perhaps this is a hint at the growth of *God's* kingdom beginning with the household conversions and house churches with which Christianity started.

11:18 *And if Satan-* Mark adds that the Lord spoke all this "in parables" (Mk. 3:23). 'Satan' was a parable and is being used here in a non-literal sense. The Lord reasons with them on their own ground, assuming for a moment that their wrong ideas were true- hence "*if Satan...*". The one who cast out Satan / demons was of course Jesus personally. Their false logic and theology had led them to label a good man as Satan just because He did a good work of healing. So quickly, false logic and theology drives jealous people along a path of demonization, negative labelling of others and religious hatred.

*Also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? Because you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebub-* Ez. 17:14 uses this language about how Old Testament kingdom of Judah no longer 'stood' because of their disobedience. The true Kingdom of God would 'stand' for ever (Dan. 2:44). The Lord may be hinting that Israel was no longer God's Kingdom and was in fact therefore Satan's kingdom- for the true Kingdom of God would always stand. It is Satan's Kingdom which falls, not God's.

Bible readers are familiar with the personification of sin as a man called 'Satan', the enemy. This symbolic man is in fact the antithesis of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we follow this theme through Scripture, it becomes apparent that we are just at the tip of an iceberg. This symbolic man has a kingdom and almost every attribute of the Lord Jesus and *His* Divine Kingdom of righteousness. Consider the similarities:

Satan has a Kingdom (Lk. 11:18)

The power and glory of which have been *delivered* to him by God, and which he can give to whomsoever he will (Lk. 4:6)

Angels (Mt. 25:41; 2 Cor. 12:7 Gk.)

The power of death (Heb. 2:14 cp. Hos. 13:14; Rev. 1:18; 20:6)

Power to condemn men (1 Tim. 3:6)

A judgment seat and system of rewards based on that of Christ (Mt. 6:1 cp. 2,16)

Condemned sinners are invited to the 'feast' of God's judgments and given suitable wedding clothes (Zeph. 1:7,8) in parody of the Kingdom (Mt. 22:2,3)

Is a father (Jn. 8:44)

Has children (Acts 13:10; 1 Jn. 3:10 cp. Heb. 2:13)

And a wisdom that is opposed to God's wisdom (James 3:15-17)

Armour (Lk. 11:22)

Power (Acts 26:18)

Spiritual "depths" (Rev. 2:24, s.w. Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:18)

Seed which he sows (Mt. 13:39)

A throne (Rev. 2:13; 2 Thess. 2:4)

A mystery (2 Thess. 2:7; Rev. 2:24)

"Power... signs and... wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:13)

Stands at the right hand of men (Ps. 109:6 cp. 109:31; 16:8; 110:1)

Is likened to lightening (Lk. 10:18 cp. 17:24)

Puts things in men's' hearts (Jn. 13:2 cp. 2 Cor. 8:16)

He is a son who will be "revealed" (2 Thess. 2:4), as Christ will be (Lk. 17:30, same Gk.)

He is "he that comes" (2 Cor. 11:4), a phrase so often used about the Lord Jesus (Lk. 7:19,20; Jn. 7:27,31)

He will be "revealed *in his time*" (2 Thess. 2:6), as Christ will be (Lk. 17:24)

"The god of this world" who emits a bright light into the hearts of men (2 Cor. 4:4 cp. 6)

Enthroned in God's temple (2 Thess. 2:4)

He has "works" (1 Jn. 3:8)

Figuratively comes down from heaven to earth in the last days (Rev. 12:12)

Has bread and wine of wickedness (Prov. 4:17)

His followers "hold" Christ, as the true disciples do (same words in Col. 2:9; Mt. 28:19 cp. Mt. 26:4,48,50,55,57)

Will be 'apocalypsed' as Christ will be (2 Thess. 2:8).

11:19 *And even if I-* Three times in succession the Lord uses the "if... " clause. Logic and consequence of position is therefore significant to Him. If it were not, it would totally not matter what we believed about anything.

*By Beelzebub-* 2 Kings 1:2 clearly tells us that Beelzebub was a false god of the Philistines. Jesus did not say, 'Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true'. No, He spoke as if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, 'actually, they do not exist', He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.

*Cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?-* The miracles claimed by the Jews would've compared poorly with the Lord's, rather like the attempts by the Egyptian magicians to imitate the miracles of Moses. The Lord never makes that point directly. He accepts that these people claimed to 'cast out demons' and reasons as if that is true- in order to clinch the greater point, that their whole belief system was deeply flawed. It seems to me that this is one reason why the NT writers go along with the idea of demons- to demonstrate by colossal implication that either they do not exist, or they are utterly powerless. "By whom do your sons cast them [demons] out?" (Lk. 11:19) shows the Lord assuming for a moment that there were demons, and that the Jews could cast them out. He doesn't directly challenge them on their false miracles, their exaggerated reports of healings, nor on the non-existence of demons. He takes them from where they are and seeks to lead them to truth.

*Therefore shall they be your judges-* See on Rev. 16:15.

Their own sons who had claimed to do miracles would be presented at the day of judgment when their lives were examined. The point would be made that they had condemned Jesus for something which their own sons did, and yet they had not condemned *them*, and therefore they would be condemned / judged at the hands of their own sons. Likewise the Lord reasoned that the presence of the Queen of Sheba at judgment day would be a condemnation for some in first century Israel (12:42). Judgment day will not be a mere yes / no encounter. Our lives will be laid bare, specific incidents raised and the implications of them discussed, with the persons involved or implicated standing there giving testimony; or at least, this is how it shall be for the rejected. There is a colossal importance to life and living, to justice, to the implications of actions. It's no good just shrugging and hoping for the best, allowing the passage of time to work a kind of pseudo-atonement, whereby we forget the implications of our actions.

The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees. Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world (Heb.

11:7); the very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27); and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). Noah's very act of righteousness in building the ark condemned / judged those who saw it and didn't respond (Heb. 11:7). This is why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world".

11:20 *But if I by the finger of God-* A comparison of Mt. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20 shows that "the finger of God" and "the spirit of God" are parallel - God in action is His spirit. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth" (Ps. 33:6). One reason the Lord did miracles was to try to drive people towards a final decision about Him- see Mt. 12:30. Either He did them by the Spirit, and was therefore attested at God's Messiah and providing a true foretaste of the Messianic Kingdom- or, as the Pharisees claimed, the source of power He was clearly tapping into must be from 'the other side', from evil. The population were therefore faced with a deep choice- either He was who He claimed, or He was an agent of Satan. There was no middle position. It was clear that Jesus, a manual worker from Nazareth, had access to some cosmic power on a scale previously unknown in the earth. The Bible clearly teaches that there is no power but of God. And there is only one God. Those teachings alone make redundant any concept of a personal cosmic Satan and demons. If I had faced off against first century Palestinians deeply persuaded of demonic forces, I think I would've gone down the road of arguing that the God of Israel is omnipotent, quoting Is. 45:7 etc. But the Son of God did it differently. He demonstrated beyond doubt, even by his fiercest enemies, that He had access to superhuman power. He was happy to bear with their idea that there were two 'powers' in the cosmos- of good (from Yahweh) and evil (from Satan). But He then argued that seeing He was doing good, He must therefore have access to that good power. He must, therefore, have unique relationship with Yahweh. Those who clung on to their beliefs in Satan and the power of evil were left with no option but to accept that either He was of Satan, or of God. And seeing His works were *good* (as they grudgingly admit in Jn. 10:33), they really had to accept He was of God. And clearly His power was such that effectively, the supposedly 'evil force' was of no account. The next verse goes on to develop the point- that these miracles were a plundering of the palace of 'Satan', so therefore the power of Jesus was such that He had effectively subdued

this being and left 'him' powerless. This was a far more effective path to take than a point blank denial of the existence of any evil power or Satan figure.

*Cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you-* The Greek *phthano* can carry the idea of to anticipate or precede; it is translated "go before" in 1 Thess. 4:15. The Lord's miracles were a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God on earth will be, with no sickness and total healing, spiritually and physically. In the ministry and person of Jesus we see a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God will actually be; and 'the Kingdom' was a title of Christ, so closely was He personally the epitome of that time (Lk. 17:21). If we want to know what the future Kingdom of God on earth will be like- look at the person and actions of Jesus. He was in Himself the proclamation and essence of that Kingdom. The descriptions of a renewed earth in Isaiah focus very much on the physicalities of that time, and at best describe the situation during the initial part of God's Kingdom. But the ultimate spiritual essence of life in eternity is to be found in Jesus as a person.

11:21 *When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe-* The strength of sin, and thereby the extent of the Lord's victory, is brought out by another unreal element in the Lord's picture of "a strong man fully armed [guarding] his own court" (Lk. 11:21 RV). This householder is fanatic; he wanders around fully armed to protect his own courtyard and his goods, rather than getting servants or guards to do it. The Lord being "stronger than he" through the cross was therefore indeed strong. See on Lk. 13:9. 'Beelzebub' can mean 'Lord of the house'. The 'strong man' is clearly 'Satan' in the parable the Lord is creating here (Mk. 3:23). Note the allusions to Samson (Jud. 14:18).

11:22 *But when one stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him his whole armour in which he had trusted, and divides his spoils-* The idea of the Lord binding satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb: 'those that are bound')". With the same thought in mind, Paul spoke of how through the cross, Christ "*spoiled* principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15). It may be that this is one of many examples of the New Testament writers thinking in a Hebrew way, despite writing in Greek. "Principalities and powers" is perhaps an intensive plural, referring to the *great* principality and power, i.e. Satan. The way He 'triumphed over them in himself' (Gk. + AVmg.) would certainly make more sense if they referred to the Biblical devil / satan which was overcome within Christ (cp. the language of Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Pet. 2:24). Eph. 2:15,16 appears to be parallel to Col. 2:15. It

speaks of how Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments... for to make *in himself* of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". Col. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross as the victorious champion, killing "principalities and powers" and then triumphing over them by sharing their spoils with his soldiers. Eph. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross "slaying the enmity" (the Biblical Devil) and achieving peace and reconciliation for all those within His body. Yet in the immediate context, the Lord is offering an explanation of why His miracles proved He was the Messiah. He hadn't yet died on the cross; but He was doing the works which were possible as a result of the binding of Satan which He would then achieve. This is yet another example of the Lord's confidence that He would overcome, and God going along with Him in this. The Lord's miracles were a physical foretaste of the great spiritual blessings which would be made available as a result of the binding of Satan by the Lord's death and resurrection.

The "spoils" of Satan are those things which he has taken away; surely the spoils taken from Satan by Christ refer to the righteousness which our nature takes away from us. Lk. 11:22 adds another detail to the story. The "armour" of Satan which he depends upon is taken away by Christ on the cross, and then Satan is bound, and his spoils shared out. The armour of Satan is the antithesis of the armour of righteousness (Eph. 6:11,13). As the Kingdom of God has a God who dwells in darkness, a Prince, an armour, a Christ, a dominion, a will and spirit, fruits, rewards etc., so does the kingdom of (the personified) Satan. The armour of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit, the righteous characteristics of the Spirit. The armour of Satan is the fruits of the flesh nature. These have been taken away by Christ, He has bound Satan, and therefore what Satan has robbed us of, the fruits of righteousness, his spoils, can be taken at will by the Lord Jesus. We have shown that Christ was alluding to Is. 53:12, which says that through the cross, Christ divides the spoil with the bound ones, i.e. us. In this lies a paradox. Binding is associated with sin (Ps. 68:6; Is. 61:1; Lam. 1:14; Lk. 13:16). We are bound, in many ways, intrinsically limited by our own natures. Only at the second coming will Satan be bound, i.e. the Lord's personal achievement will be physically shared with the world (Rev. 20:2). Yet we, the bound ones, are given the goods which the Lord personally took away from the bound Satan. Those goods are the righteous attributes which our natures stop us possessing as we should. The dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided *all* His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of *all* the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12). We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of

righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe.

It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us. In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death.

There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17), confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self-restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one

area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so.

Grasping this extensive theme helps explain the deep sense of paradox which is central to all serious self-examination. We are counted righteous, we are given spiritual gifts of righteousness now, and our self-examination reveals this to us; but we are expected to develop them (according to the parable of the pounds). Yet we also see that we are pathetically bound by our Satan, somehow held back from that life of righteousness which we would fain achieve. All these things were deeply foreseen and appreciated by the Lord when He constructed this parable of binding Satan. Christ in His own life has overcome Satan, and has graciously shared the various aspects of righteousness with the whole of His body. This is the very idea of the body of Christ; between us, over time, we will approximate to the perfect reflection of our Lord. We have each been given different aspects to develop, different parts of His personality. This explains the difference in emphasis which can be observed within the different parts of the present body, and also in the history of the body over time.

11:23 *He that is not with me is against me*- The original is memorable- either *meta* Me, or *kata* Me. The Lord is speaking here from *His* perspective. For He Himself observed that Judas 'ate *with Me*', but lifted up his heel '*against Me*' (Jn. 13:18). It's simply not so that all those who claim to be with the Lord are therefore with Him and on the same side as we who know we are in truth 'with' Him. He is simply observing an ultimate truth- that finally, there will be (and therefore is not now) any middle position in relation to Him. It's not therefore for us to insist that anyone who claims to be 'with Him' is so merely because they say so. Let His words sink in to you personally: "He who is not with me is against me... he that is not against us is for us" (Mt. 12:30; Mk. 9:40). We may think we are not against the Lord's cause, even if we're not as committed to it as we might be; many an unbaptized young person has told me this. But to be 'not against' Jesus means we must be *with Him*. Nobody can be passively 'not against' Jesus. If we're not whole heartedly with Him, we're against Him. That's how His demanding logic goes. A relationship with Him demands the whole person; *you*, your very heart and essence.

*And he that does not gather with me scatters*- In connection with the gathering of spoil from the strong man's house. There is a tendency to use this verse as a general statement of principle, but the surrounding context is specifically about the Lord's healing miracles being part of the

spoil He has plundered from the 'Lord of the house', Beelzebub / Satan. People were faced with the choice of accepting the Lord's miracles were performed using either God's power, or Satan's. The whole issue pushed the audience to a crucial choice- of accepting of Jesus as God's special Son, or as Satan. The miracles were proof that the Lord Jesus had bound the power of Satan- the power which people believed was behind illness. If you didn't want to go and gather the spoil, then you were actively scattering it abroad. This hyperbole was used to force all the cautious people who remained undecided to realize that ultimately, there is no such thing as agnosticism. If you are not eagerly gathering the spoil the Lord has now released, then you are actively working against Him.

The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19;13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment.

11:24 *When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says-* The ministry of the Lord Jesus was a follow up to that of John the Baptist, and that theme is never far from us in Luke's Gospel. Those not against who are for in :23 may well refer to John's disciples. The unclean spirit was cast out of Israel due to their surface level response to John's preaching- this was the sweeping of the house. But it returned and that generation became more evil than before. This lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Demons supposedly didn't like water (as in Mt. 8:28-34). Again we find the Lord using the language of the day without correcting it. The reference is also to the Jews going into the wilderness to hear John's preaching.

*I will return to my house from which I came-* The Greek word is elsewhere translated to convert (Mt. 13:15). Israel's rejection of Jesus was effectively a re-conversion away from John's message. The same word is used of how John was to convert Israel to their God (Lk. 1:16,17). "Came [out]" is the same word used thrice about that generation going out into the wilderness to hear John (Mt. 11:7-9).

11:25 *And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order-* The only other usage of the word "swept" is in the Lord's self-description of His 'sweeping' the house of Israel in order to find the lost (Lk. 15:8). The house of Israel had been swept- but the nation had not been 'found' because they would not come to Jesus in repentance.

11:26 *Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first-* "State" is an addition from the translators. "The last" was the state of condemnation which that generation ended up in. The Lord's comments that the first would be "last" (Mt. 20:16) could therefore be taken as a reference to the final condemnation of the Jewish religious leadership, "the first". However, "the last", the *eschatos*, could refer to their status at the judgment of the last day. But the essence of judgment is now, and the Lord saw them as already in that state. It "is worse" and yet thus 'it shall be' for that generation.

11:27 *And it came to pass, as he said these things, that a certain woman out of the crowd lifted up her voice and said to him: Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts which you did suck-* The woman was not merely making a passing comment, but alluding somehow to the repeated blessedness attached to Mary (1:28,42,48). Perhaps the Angel's words to Mary were already known and publicized; or perhaps this was a close relative whom Mary had told this to; or maybe Luke is just demonstrating the truth of the Angelic promise that all generations would call Mary "blessed".

11:28 *But he said: Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it-* The Lord shifts all focus away from considering Mary to be blessed just because she happened to be the physical channel used for His conception. Rather her blessedness was to be understood in terms of how she heard God's word and kept it, meditating upon it in her heart (2:19,51). Likewise we can take the warning that even if the Father clearly uses us as a channel, this doesn't of itself mean we are acceptable with Him. It is personal spirituality, of the kind Mary had, which is all significant.

Paul Wyncs has spotted the following connections:

### REVELATION 1

### LUKE 11

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein. (v.3)	Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it. (v.28)
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Seven spirits (angels) before the throne. (v.4)	Contrast – seven unclean spirits invited into the house. (v.24-26)
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The resurrected Christ – I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore. (v.12-19)	The sign of Jonah the prophet. (v.29-32)
--	--

The seven golden candlesticks.  
(v.12,13,20)

The parable of the  
lighted candlestick.  
(v.33-36)

The lesson for us is that the Lord even in His Heavenly glory alluded to His dear mother's attitude, and held her up as the pattern for all His people. She had an eternal influence upon Him. Even in His Heavenly glory, the incidents of that day in Lk. 11, and the example of His mother, remained with Him. This is surely a tremendous incentive to parents- their influence on their children may be a factor in how their children will eternally be. The Lord was alluding to how His mother had "kept" God's word in her heart in devout meditation (Lk. 2:51). He didn't say 'Blessed is *she* because *she* heard the word and kept it'. Rather, "blessed are *they*". He was surely saying: 'Don't just dumbly admire my mother, with some kind of distant, spectator admiration; she is the pattern for *all* of you. Follow her, make her the pattern of *your* life with respect to God's word, rather than just gasp at her example'.

11:29 *And when the crowds were gathering together to him, he began to say: This generation is an evil generation. It seeks after a sign-* Ahaz was likewise rebuked for seeking a sign instead of believing in faith the Messianic prophecies. The Lord had been clearly doing signs / miracles. They were maybe claiming that they personally had not been present when the signs were done, and now they wanted to see one. But Lk. 11:16 adds the detail that they sought a "sign from Heaven". This continues the issue under debate; the Pharisees accepted that Jesus was doing signs / miracles, but they considered them to be from 'Satan'; the Lord has responded by saying that His good works show He is a good man working on God's behalf, and that they would be called to account at the last day for their blasphemy. But it seems this other group of Pharisees continue in the blasphemous position- their response is to assume that the earlier miracles were signs from 'Satan', but now they give the Lord a chance to do a sign / miracle from God ("Heaven"). They repeated this request later (Mt. 16:1), and again the Lord answered them with "the sign of the prophet Jonah". It's not necessarily wrong to require a sign- Gideon's example comes to mind. The disciples themselves asked for a sign (Mt. 24:3), and the Lord answered them to the effect that there would be "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" (Mt. 24:30). "In" Heaven can mean 'by the instrumentality of [Heaven]'. The similarity of words and concepts is so close that there must be some continuity in meaning. It could be that the sign of the Son of Man given by Heaven in the last days is the sign of Jonah- the successful preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles and the resurrection from the dead.

*But there shall no sign be given to it-* The idea could be 'no further sign', as if the Lord was saying that He would do no further dramatic miracles to seek to persuade the Pharisees. In this case, the allusion would be to the Egyptians not believing the signs given them (Ex. 4:9), resulting in their

final destruction. Unbelieving Israel are no better than Egypt / the world, and will "be condemned with the world". Note that here as often we have to read in an ellipsis: 'No *more* sign'. For He had been doing signs / miracles in abundance. Or perhaps, seeing that He did continue doing miracles: 'No sign *greater than* [that of Jonah]'.

*Except the sign of Jonah-* The 'resurrected' Jonah was a type of the Lord- and he was a 'sign' to the Ninevites presumably in that he still bore in his body the marks of a man who had been three days within a fish. It could be that the fish beached itself, and vomited Jonah out of its stomach in its death throes (this is how beached whales meet their end). In this case, the fish would have drawn the attention of the local population, as would have the man with bleached hair and strange skin who walked away from it. We too as witnesses of Christ will have something about us that is unintentionally striking in the eyes of those with whom we mix. There was no human chance that Jonah would be listened to when he came to preach judgment against Nineveh. Some guy standing on the edge of town, saying 'You're all gonna be destroyed'. People would have laughed, ignored him, or told him to shut up. But there was something about him that was gripping and arresting. He was living proof that the judgment of God is real, and that His mercy is just as real. Presumably Jonah must have said far more than "Nineveh is going to be destroyed".

It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have borne in his body the marks of his experience for all to see, as our Lord did. Being inside the fish for that period may have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them- so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that "the judge stands before the door". What is our response to Jonah/Jesus?

11:30 *For even as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation-* As Jonah was three days in the whale and then came up out of it to preach to the Gentiles, so the Lord would be three days in the grave and then would rise- as a sign to the Jews. But how was His resurrection a sign to them, seeing they never saw His risen body? Yet the Lord's reasoning demands that His resurrection be a sign to them, just as tangible as the re-appearance of the drowned Jonah. But, the Jews never saw Him after the resurrection...? The resolution must be that in the preaching of the risen Jesus by those in Him, it was as if the

Jews saw Him, risen and standing as a sign before them, every bit as real as the Jonah who emerged from the whale after three days.

11:31 *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and shall condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here-* "Rise up" translates *egeiro* whereas "stand up" in :32 translates *anistemi*. The Ninevites will "rise in judgment", as a judge arises to pronounce a verdict; whereas the Queen of the South arises "in *the* judgment", with the article. The difference may be because the Queen of the South is being portrayed as being resurrected along with the people of the Lord's generation. The reference is perhaps more to resurrection than to arising in judgment.

If Sheba is at the very end of 'the earth', we have another confirmation that the 'earth' or land in Scripture often refers to the land promised to Abraham, and not the entire planet. The point is that she made a huge effort to come to hear Divine truth, whereas Christ as "the wisdom of God" stood before their eyes and they refused to believe and repent. The parallel is between the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites, who repented. We may be able to infer that she likewise repented upon hearing Solomon's wisdom. The whole theme in this section is of the need to make an abiding repentance upon hearing God's Truth as spoken by His Son.

11:32 *The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it-* We must read in an ellipsis, '[the people of] this generation'. For individuals and not entire generations will be judged. 'Standing up' is possibly an allusion to the resurrection of the responsible at the last day, but more likely the figure is of a judge arising in judgment to state the verdict; which in this case, is condemnation. The Lord in :19 has spoken of how the children of the Jews would judge those Jews in the last day. The Lord clearly seems to envisage the judgment process as having a public dimension to it. The fact one person was spiritually responsive, given a similar or harder set of circumstances than what another has had who did not respond, will therefore as it were be the judgment of the person who didn't respond. It clearly won't be merely an awards ceremony nor a yes / no decision, but rather will context and precedent from others be taken into account. 'If *they* responded and *you* did not, given similar circumstances, then *they* will condemn *you*'- that seems to be the Lord's reasoning.

The truly righteous among the remnant "shall tread down the wicked... (as) ashes under the soles of your feet" (Malachi 4:3). "The wicked" are those of Malachi 3:18 and 4:1 - the unspiritual element amongst the latter-day Jewish 'remnant' in Jerusalem. This implies that in some way the spiritual Jews acceptable to Jesus will mete out judgment on the

rejected ones. Perhaps in similar fashion the men of Nineveh will condemn the first century Jews at the judgment (Luke 11:32), and we will judge Angels (1 Cor. 6:3). In this way the righteous remnant shall "discern (judge) between the righteous and the wicked" (Malachi 3:18). The men of Nineveh will condemn first century Israel, just as the folly of the rejected will be made manifest unto all men (2 Tim. 3:9). This is not so as to simply humiliate the rejected. It is so that the faithful *learn* something too. This was all foreshadowed in the way that Israel experienced their judgments in the sight of the nations, so that God's principles would be taught even to the Gentile world (Ez. 5:8,15). Indeed, the idea of God executing judgment on His people *in the sight* of others is quite common (e.g. Ez. 5:8; 16:41). But we can learn the principles of God's judgments right now, from His word.

*For they repented-* The Lord has explained that initially the people had responded to John's message- the demon had been as it were cast out and the house of Israel left swept and cleaned. But both John and Jesus appealed for repentance, in the very same words: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2; 4:17). But they had not really repented; they had responded to a religious message but not really repented. And the challenge comes down to us- as to whether our repentance, along with any spiritual act, is indeed the real thing or a mere appearance.

*At the preaching of Jonah, and behold, a greater than Jonah is here-* This effectively is a noun, referring to "the preaching" as in the message of Jonah. What he preached was judgment to come, and the Ninevites repented on hearing it. The Lord was teaching not only judgment to come, but was making specific the call to repentance implicit within that message, and urging people to accept God's grace. Hence those who heard Him were even more guilty before the Ninevites. Jonah's preaching occurred *after* he had been three days within the whale; after the Lord had been three days in the earth, He too would preach mightily, through the ministry of those 'in Him' who were effectively His representatives and appealed on His behalf. But He reasons as if that appeal was already being made- as if in essence He had already passed through the cross and resurrection. This is not the only time He reasons in this way; in proclaiming Himself Lord, the serpent lifted up on the pole, the One who had already "overcome the world", He reasoned as if the successful outcome of His death had already occurred. Such was His faith that He would come forth triumphant.

11:33 *No one when he has lit a lamp puts it in a cellar, neither under a bucket, but on the lightstand, so that they who enter in may see the light-* See on Lk. 8:16. We may wonder why the Lord at this point appears to be repeating so many elements from the sermon on the mount recorded in

Mt. 5-7. That sermon was given in Galilee; now He is near Bethany in the Jerusalem area (at the end of chapter 10). He is repeating His Galilean teachings for the southerners.

The Lord speaks of how we are the light of the world, giving light to the world in the same way as "they" light a lamp. Who are the "they"? The point has been made that to first century Palestinian ears, the answer was obvious: Women. Because lighting the lamps was a typical female duty, which men were not usually involved in. Could it not be that the Lord Jesus even *especially* envisaged women as His witnesses? Did He here have in mind how a great company of women would be the first to share the news that the light of the world had risen?

The Greek article in "the lamp / candlestick" refers to the specific candlestick, and to Jewish minds this would surely have referred to the candlestick in the Holy Place (s.w. Heb. 9:2). This continues the theme of the Lord teaching a new form of Judaism, for His sermon on the mount is full of allusions to previous Mosaic practice, but redefining it. The implication is that ordinary men are present in the Holy Place too, who will see our light. Or it could be that Jesus has in mind how it was the priests who alone entered the Holy Place- and He is saying that the light from those who followed Him would illuminate the Jewish priesthood. The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

The story of the candle that was put under a bucket brings out an issue related to that of the desire to root up the tares: the candle was put there (presumably) on account of an almost paranoiac fear that the wind would blow it out; but this over-protection of the lamp in itself caused the light to go out (Mt. 5:15). Time and again, preaching the light, holding up the beacon of the word of Christ's cross, has been impeded or stifled in the name of preserving the truth, strengthening what remains (words taken out of context). And because of this lack of witness, this lack of holding out the light to others, the fire of Christ has waxed dim amongst us. This ties in to the theme that preaching is not just commanded as a publicity exercise for Almighty God; He doesn't need us to do that for Him. It is commanded for the benefit of the preacher more than those preached to. To put a candle under a bucket or bed seems senseless; yet this is how senseless and inappropriate it is to hold back preaching for the sake of defending the Faith. Indeed to put it under a bed (Mk. 4:21) and then go to sleep (candles are normally only lit at night) is likely to destroy the person who does it, to burn them while they are asleep. All who have the light but don't preach it (in whatever form) are likely to suffer the same;

notice how the Lord (by implication) links night time and sleepiness with an apathy in preaching. Evidently the Lord foresaw the attitude that has surfaced amongst His people: 'We must concentrate on keeping the Truth, new converts are often problematic, too much energy goes to preaching rather than building up ourselves in the faith'. Probably the resistance to preaching to the Gentiles in the first century used similar reasoning. The Lord may have had in mind a Talmud entry (*Shabbat* 107a) which permitted the covering of a lamp with a bowl on the Sabbath if it was done in order to stop the entire house catching fire. He is arguing that such a fear based attitude, fearful of possible consequence if we share the light, will result in the light going out. And that lesson needs to be learnt time and again.

11:34 *The lamp of your body is your eye. When your eye is single, your whole body also is full of light-* This observation about single-mindedness ["healthy" = 'single'] follows on from the Lord's teaching about the overall direction of the human mind, observing that we cannot have two overall directions for our heart. Our eye must be single, the entrance of light must be only from one source. God gives to all men with a single eye (James 1:5 Gk.); and in response, we too must be single eyed in our giving (s.w.). If our eye / world-view / outlook on life is *single* [s.w. 'simple' in the passages quoted], then our whole body / life will be full of light. In daily work, in private reflection and planning for our immediate futures and present needs, there must be a direct and undiluted belief of the teachings of the Gospel, connecting those teachings to our daily life of faith. In this simplicity of the life of faith, in a world that makes life so complicated [especially for the poor], we will find humility. With that simplicity and humility will come peace, and the ability to pray with a concentrated and uncluttered mind, without our thoughts wandering off into the petty troubles of life as we frame our words before Almighty God each morning and night.

I've always sensed that the more complex a person, the harder it is for them to be generous. But we are all commanded to be generous to the Lord's cause, knowing that nothing we have is our own. And I am not only talking to wealthy brethren. *All* of us have something, and all of us can give something to our brethren. Consider how the poor believers of the first century such as Corinth [amongst whom there were not many rich or mighty, Paul reminds them] collected funds for the poor brethren in Judea. There is a Greek word translated "simplicity" which is related to the word translated "single" here. It occurs eight times in the NT. Five of these are in 2 Corinthians, written as it was in the context of Corinth giving funds for the Jerusalem poor.

Consider how the word is translated:

- Paul had "*simplicity* and Godly sincerity" (2 Cor. 1:12)
- They had "*liberality*" (2 Cor. 8:2)
- "*Bountifulness*" (2 Cor. 9:11)
- Their "*liberal distribution*" (2 Cor. 9:13)
- He feared lest they be corrupted from "the *simplicity* that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Evidently Paul saw a link between generosity and the simplicity of the faith in Christ. It doesn't need a lexicon to tell you that this word means both 'simplicity' and also 'generous'. The connection is because the basis for generosity is a simple faith. Not a dumb, blind faith, glossing over the details of God's word. But a realistic, simple, direct conviction. This is why Paul exhorts that all giving to the Lord's cause should be done with "simplicity" (Rom. 12:8- the AVmg. translates 'liberally'). Give, in whatever way, and don't complicate it with all the ifs and buts which our fleshly mind proposes. Paul warns them against false teachers who would corrupt them from their "simplicity"- and yet he usually speaks of 'simplicity' in the sense of generosity. Pure doctrine, wholeheartedly accepted, will lead us to be generous. False doctrine and human philosophy leads to all manner of self-complication. Paul was clever, he was smart; but he rejoiced that he lived his life "in simplicity...by the grace of God" (2 Cor. 1:12). If our eye is single (translating a Greek word related to that translated 'simple'), then the whole body is full of light- and the Lord spoke again in the context of generosity. An evil eye, a world view that is not 'simple' or single, is used as a figure for mean spiritedness.

*But when it is evil, your body also is full of darkness-* A bad or evil eye was an idiom for mean spiritedness. It continues the theme of materialism from the previous verses. To follow materialism is to be mean spirited- towards God. Speaking in the context of serving *either* God *or* mammon, the Lord uttered these difficult words: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth... the light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness... how great is that darkness!" (Mt. 6:19-22 AV). All this is in the context of not being materialistic. The Lord is drawing on the OT usage of "an evil eye" - and consistently, this idiom means someone who is selfishly materialistic (Prov. 22:9; 23:7; 28:22; Dt. 15:9). The NIV renders some of these idioms as "stingy" or "mean".

11:35 *Look therefore whether the light that is in you is not darkness-* See on 1 Cor. 4:4. A single eye refers to a generous spirit (1 Chron. 29:17 LXX), and a related Greek word occurs in 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11,13 with the sense of "generous". So surely the Lord is saying that our attitude to

wealth controls our whole spirituality. Whether we have a mean or generous spirit will affect our whole life- an evil [stingy] eye means our whole body is full of darkness. Just let this sink in. If we are materialistic, our whole life will be filled with darkness, whatever our external pretensions may be, and there is a definite link to be made here with the "darkness" of rejection. The riches of Jericho are described with a Hebrew word which means both a curse, and something devoted (to God; Josh. 6:18). This teaches a powerful lesson: such riches of this world as come into our possession will curse us, unless they are devoted to the Father.

*11:36 If therefore your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it shall be wholly full of light, as when the lamp with its bright shining gives you light-* The Lord Jesus likens Himself to a candle that has been lit and displayed publicly, giving light to us. He then continues that imagery in some rather difficult words. He says that in our lives, the eye is "the light of the body"- a good eye lets light and vision in, thus totally and fundamentally affecting how we are inside us, as persons. But if the eye is faulty, then there is darkness within. But when the eye is good and functioning, the whole person is "full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle gives you light" (Lk. 11:33-36). But earlier, He's defined Himself as the candle which gives light. He seems to be saying that our "eye", our perception of Him, is vital. And this is exactly the context of this passage- He's been lamenting how Israel haven't perceived Him for who He is. If we perceive Him rightly, if our "eye" is good, then our whole body will be filled with the light which comes from Him. But it all depends upon our image / perception of / eye for Jesus. Hence the vital and ultimate importance of understanding and perceiving Him correctly. The subject we're now studying actually couldn't be more important; for the correct perception of Him will fill our whole lives with light, totally affect our internal world-views, granting us an ability to understand and make sense of all around us and within us in the light of the person of Jesus. And if we don't perceive Him aright, our inner lives will be dark and formless, whatever external trappings of culture and knowledge we may have.

*11:37 Now as he spoke, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, and he went in and sat down to eat-* Eating together had a religious dimension in the first century. But the Jews were more open in their view of fellowship than many are today. Clearly the Pharisee wanted to find fault, but he had no problem at this stage in eating with the Lord.

*11:38 And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner-* Rabbi Josef claimed that "to eat with unwashed hands is as great a sin as adultery". And Rabbi Akiba in captivity used his water ration to wash his hands rather than to drink, resulting in him almost dying of dehydration. The Lord seems to have purposefully ignored

this tradition in order to provoke the inevitable conversation about it. The Lord Jesus had asked the disciples to be obedient to every jot and tittle of the teaching of the Scribes, because they "sit in Moses' seat". But He was no literalist nor legalist. He broke that principle in order to establish higher ones in this context.

11:39 *And the Lord said to him: Now you the Pharisees cleanse-* The Lord Jesus is described [using the same word for "cleanse"] as making others clean (Mt. 8:2,3; 10:8; 11:5). The Pharisees were concerned with making *themselves* look clean externally. They are a parody of the Lord. He was concerned with making *others* clean, and really clean. This tension, between making ourselves look clean and making others clean, is highly relevant to us all. For there is such a thing as being spiritually selfish.

*The outside-* The tension between outside and inside, along with the idea of cleanliness, is to be found in the Lord's earlier teaching in Mk. 7:15,18. Nothing on the *outside* can defile a man, it is the *inside*, the thoughts, which must be cleansed. If we ask *why* there is a desire for good appearances externally, the answer may not simply be 'so as to look good to others'. It can also partly be a recognition of our own inner defilement and our sense that we ought to be doing something about it. Peter explores the same tension in 1 Pet. 3:3, teaching that a woman should not focus on *outside* [s.w.] adorning, but not on *internal* attitudes. He's not saying that 'outward adornment' is wrong of itself, but rather that her focus should be on *inner* spirituality rather than focusing on the *external* to the exclusion of the *internal*. Thus obsession with external cosmetic issues, and literal cosmetics, can likely be a running away from internal issues which need serious addressing. So often pedantic attitudes to externalities conceal insecurity, and in spiritual terms, that insecurity is a reflection of disbelief that the inner conscience has been cleansed of sin in Christ.

*Of the cup and plate, but your inward part is full of extortion-* The plate and cup refer to the Pharisees personally. The picture is of silverware being cleansed and shining outwardly, whilst it contains unclean things within. "Even so *you also* outwardly appear righteous" (Mt. 23:28). Here Lk. 11:39 speaks of 'them' as their inward part: "*Your* inward part is full of ravening [Gk. 'extortion'] and wickedness [Gk. 'plots']". They were ever scheming how to get money out of people. But why choose these two items as examples? The presence of the article both times, *the* cup and *the* plate, suggest they have specific relevance. The Gospels were written as the handbook for the early Christian converts and ecclesias. They would largely have been recited or read at the breaking of bread meetings. It's hard therefore to avoid the reference to the memorial cup and plate of the communion meetings. And again, the warning comes so close to home. The memorial meeting is the time to look within, at the

likely wickedness within us, rather than appearing in our Sunday best and making ourselves shine externally.

*And wickedness-* The Greek suggests complete lack of restraint. And here is the paradox. The most rule-governed people were actually without any sense of restraint. Obedience to rules, and elevating rules, does not of itself mean we are restrained. It can mean the very opposite.

11:40 *You foolish ones, did not He that made the outside make the inside also?*- Cleaning the inside of a cup doesn't make the outside clean. But that is the jump of faith required. The inside is the outside- in God's eyes. He created the aspect of external appearance, as well as the mind and "inward part" (:39). He perceives the precise interplay between appearances and internal reality- because He is creator and designer, not merely of our bodies, but of human psychology. To think we can hide our thoughts from Him is indeed "foolish".

11:41 *But give for alms those things which are within, and behold, all things are clean to you-* This textual reading [not supported by AV] would be saying that giving of alms is one of the external things which is not the essence. What is essential is to give our "inward part", our inner thoughts, to God. To be filled with *His* Spirit in *our* spirit. "To be spiritually minded" is the very and essential core of Christianity. No amount of giving money and external things can compensate for a deficit in this.

The AV reads as if giving alms makes all things clean. In Lk. 16:9, the Lord is saying that the use of our material possessions is so important that it's *almost as if* (in the hyperbole) we can buy our way into the Kingdom. He made the point in so many words in Lk. 11:41 AV: "Give alms of such things as ye have (i.e. regardless of how small); and, behold, all things are clean unto you". Paul seems to have these words in mind when says that to the pure, all things are pure (Tit. 1:15)- as if he saw the epitome of purity as being in giving what we have. "The ransom of a man's life are his riches" (Prov. 13:8) likewise suggests that our attitude to riches is one of the things that decides our eternal destiny.

11:42 *But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe-* The Greek can equally mean to both take or receive tithes. They demanded and perhaps paid themselves tithes on absolutely everything.

*Mint, rue and every herb-* These plants grew on windowsills, and a tenth of their 'crop' would've been very light in weight. The lightness of the 'crop' is contrasted with the 'heavier' things which were required of believers. Again, the Lord could've deployed convincing Biblical arguments that the tithe was to be paid from harvested crops, and given to the Levites / priests- not the Pharisees. For they were not the same as the priests. There is no hint in the Mosaic legislation that a tenth of such things was to be given to support the livelihood of the priests. But the

Lord goes along with their position- and doesn't say they should not do this. Rather He lifts the issue to a higher and 'heavier' level. In engagement with those who wilfully misunderstand Scripture, it's easy to present a strictly Biblical case which demolishes their position. And the Lord could so easily have done this in the matter of tithing kitchen herbs. But He doesn't. He simply raises weightier issues and principles.

*And neglect justice and the love of God; but these you should have done-* In line with the teaching in :41, it seems they thought that by such alms giving and tithing, they were excused from being spiritually minded within. "The inward part" of :40,41 is therefore a mind focused upon "justice and the love of God". To think justly of and for others is far more than making a material donation.

*And not to leave the other undone-* The Greek *aphiemi* occurs again in Mt. 23:38; 24:2: "Your house is left [*aphiemi*] unto you desolate", and there would therefore not be left [*aphiemi*] one stone upon another in that temple / house; not one part of the masonry would be omitted or overlooked, every stone would be thrown down. They had omitted the weightier matters of justice etc., thinking they were justified in this because they did not omit to tithe kitchen herbs. But the Lord is saying that effectively they *had* omitted "the other", the tithing of kitchen herbs. So although they did tithe them, effectively they had not done so. Because they had omitted the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith. So they tithed, but they did not tithe. Just as we can pray, but not pray; think we believe, when we do not; forgive, when we do not really; read God's word, when we do not really do so [as the Lord often pointed out to them in saying "Have you never read...?", when clearly on one level they had read]. Omitting justice, mercy and faith meant that their tithing of the small stuff was also omitted, in God's final view of them. The spiritual life is intended to be all encompassing, it's not a case of a series of specific obediences to a long list of specific commandments, whereby our omission of the heavier issues is compensated for by our commission of the lighter issues. And this again is a challenge to us all; for surveying God's expectations of us, we can so easily cut ourselves slack in some areas because we feel we are being obedient in others. Thus the failure of the Pharisees in this becomes not something to merely shake our heads at, but a challenge to our deepest internal reasonings in our own walk before God.

11:43 *Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues-* They wanted to be publicly seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of

His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity.

*And the greetings in the marketplaces-* The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (Mt. 20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the Gospel (Mt. 11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

11:44 *Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it-* A month before Passover, the graves were painted white so that the pilgrims coming to keep the feast would not be defiled. This was therefore something fresh in everyone's minds, for the Lord was speaking at Passover time. It was as if they had not whitened / cleansed themselves before Passover as was required, and thereby led men into defilement rather than the purity which they so emphasized and demanded.

11:45 *And one of the lawyers answering said to him: Teacher, in saying this you reproach us also-* This particular lawyer perhaps said this in recognition of their sin. For the context is of the Lord accusing the Pharisees of hypocrisy; and the lawyer speaks up and says that actually, this was true of lawyers too.

11:46 *And he said: Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens-* John appears to allude to this in saying that the true commandments are "not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3, s.w. "heavy"). The fences created by men around God's law are in fact higher than the actual Divine law. God's laws have a creative intention, whereas human fences around them are totally negative in their intention. The Lord uses the same word later in the discourse, in stating that the 'heavier' matters of the law are justice, mercy and faith. Yet even those things are not "heavy" (1 Jn. 5:3) in the sense that the regulations of the Pharisees were. The Lord's burden is light compared with the weight of carrying unforgiven sin (Mt. 11:30). The parallel between sin and heavy burdens is also found in David's comment about carrying the weight of his unforgiven sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 38:4). The burden of sin was thus tied upon people by giving them religious rules which they were unable to keep due to human weakness, and because sin is partly a matter of conscience, it was still counted to the people as sin if they broke it. Therefore to enforce such rules upon people was effectively lading them with sin. This principle needs to be considered by those who 'bind' isolation from other brethren upon believers, or who 'bind' them to a single life after divorce.

*Hard to bear-* The Lord sensitively commented that He had many things to command His disciples, "but you cannot bear / carry [s.w.] them at this time" (Jn. 16:12). In teaching others God's requirements, we must be sensitive to human weakness, rather than present them with a whole set of Divine standards as a package and demand their immediate acceptance of it. The Lord still accepted the disciples, even though He had not asked them to do all the things He would like to have asked them to do. And there are likewise levels of discipleship for us too. The same word is also used about carrying the cross of Jesus (Lk. 14:27; Jn. 19:17). This is the ultimately hard to be carried burden. If people have signed up to carry this, who are we to seek to add to it by our demands upon them. James surely had the Lord's teaching here in mind when he reasoned that neither the disciples nor the Jewish fathers had been able to carry the yoke of the Mosaic law (Acts 15:10). Any teaching that the Mosaic law must be obeyed [and there are plenty of Christians teaching this, sadly] is therefore seeking to bind a heavy burden upon men which will lead to their spiritual collapse and thereby to our own condemnation.

*And you yourselves do not touch the burdens-* Mt. 23:4 they will not move or 'remove' them. The Lord by contrast used touch frequently in order to connect with sinful people and their conditions, and to thereby heal them. The Pharisees would not touch them for fear of contamination; they would not associate or engage with sinful people and the results of their sins. The Lord used His fingers to enter the ears of the deaf and touch the eyes of the blind, secreting unclean body fluid. This is the way to remove burdens- to engage with them. And yet closed table policies effectively do the same, by refusing association with those judged by latter day Pharisees to be too serious sinners. The fear of guilt by association is utterly selfish, and results in the burdens never being removed or made lighter for the person struggling to carry them.

*With one of your fingers-* The contrast is between the weight of the burdens on the shoulders of men, so great it crushed them; and the ease with which the law-makers could remove them with their fingers, perhaps referring to their ability to write things with a few strokes of the fingers which would remove those burdens. This is ever more true today- a few taps with a finger on a keyboard to change traditional demands on fellow believers, and burdens can be removed.

*11:47 Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed-* *Oikodomeo* means not only to build but carries the sense of 'to confirm', and is also translated in the NT in this sense. On one hand, building the tombs of the prophets was a sign of respect, but the Lord read it negatively, as if by doing so they were confirming the decision to murder them made by their forefathers. We have here an example of where the same action can be judged positively or negatively by the Lord; and this of itself disproves the mentality of salvation by works. Because it

depends with what motive or background attitude the works are done, and this decides whether the work was an act of righteousness or a sin. And this is a further warning against the impossibility of judging another's works. For we fail to see those background, internal attitudes behind the work. See on Mt. 23:30 *Our fathers*.

11:48 *So you are witnesses and consent to the works of your fathers; for they killed them and you build their tombs-* "Witnesses against yourselves". The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman... that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). And note the present tense of the Lord's words here. In that the judgment process is now ongoing, we *are right now* witnesses against ourselves when we sin. And we are not only witnesses, but also the judge who pronounces the verdict of condemnation: for the sinner is condemned *of himself* (Tit. 3:11). In this lies the illogicality of sin and the utter blindness of man to the implications of his actions before God. They right now fulfil or live out the judgment of the wicked (Job 36:17).

Mt. 23:31 "You are the sons of them that slew the prophets". The idea of being a 'son of' someone or something meant to be in agreement with them, or to be a disciple of them. Again, this seems an example of imputing iniquity. Their usage of the term "our fathers" was taken by the Lord to mean that they 'allowed' or [Gk.] 'had pleasure in' the murder of the prophets (Lk. 11:48). But the same words "our fathers" are used by Paul to describe his faithless Israelite forbears- and he is not condemned for it (1 Cor. 10:1; Acts 28:25). Clearly, the same words can be used by men with different background meanings, and this is seen by God and His Son. But all we hear are the words- we cannot therefore judge them.

11:49 *Therefore also the Wisdom of God said-* This certainly sounds like a quotation from extant literature, possibly from an apocryphal book no longer known. The Lord Jesus was indeed "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), and so it could be that the Gospel writers were pointing out that these words of Jesus were a proof text amongst their persecuted converts; perhaps by quoting Matthew's words here, Luke is treating them as "the wisdom of God". Certainly the Lord's words here would've been a good mission statement for the early church. Or it could be that the Lord is quoting some now unknown text with approval. There can be no doubt that every part of the verse has direct relevance to the first

century witness to the Jews. The source of the quotation is therefore of secondary importance; the Lord places it in His own mouth, at any rate, in predicting the outcome of the great commission. And yet clearly enough, at the time He spoke these words, that bunch of mixed up, largely secular men, who misunderstood so much, who knew so little, and whose ideals were so misplaced, were far from being the preaching machine which the Lord's words imply here. We can take one simple lesson from this- He had a profound hopefulness in people, a hopefulness which against all odds so often paid off. We, by contrast, tend to be highly cynical of people because we fail to see what they might turn into in spiritual terms.

*I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute-* "Send them" is a reference to the sending of the great commission. The Lord's desire was that the worldwide witness began at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47), and Paul's interpretation of the commission was clearly that it involved being sent *firstly* to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. The secular disciples were the equivalent of the prophets in the old Israel. There may be particular reference to the New Testament prophets, those who had the Spirit gift of prophecy. Clearly the witness of the early Christians is in view.

11:50 *So that the blood of all the prophets-* This stands for '*judgment for all the righteous blood shed*'. Note how language is being used here. The sin is put by metonymy for *the judgment for the sin*. Sin is its own judgment. To sin is to ask for judgment / condemnation. In this lies the utter lack of logic in any sin. And iniquity was added to their iniquity (Ps. 69:27- a specific prophecy of the Jews who killed Jesus), just as righteousness can be imputed.

*Which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation-* "Upon you", Mt. 23:35. One would've expected God to be so hurt by the death of His Son that judgment came immediately upon those responsible. But instead, the Lord predicted that the judgment would come only after the Jews had further persecuted the apostles as they went out to fulfil the great preaching commission to the Jews. This apparent delay was not because God was not hurt or not angry. He was. But His patient love and desire for human repentance, to give them yet more chances, was simply greater. The delay was so that the Lord could send out the apostles to appeal to Israel for repentance. But they had been given final appeal after final appeal. And still God waited for their repentance. With what eagerness must He have watched for response to the preaching to them, and with what generous provision He would've provided for all those who wished to make that appeal to the Jews. And nothing has changed to this day. The idea of blood coming upon, *epi*, a person clearly meant '*guilt for their death*'. Soon the Jews

were to be using this very term in asking for the blood of Jesus to be 'upon' them (Mt. 27:25). Because Jesus was the personification of God's prophetic word and thereby the summary of all the prophets, their desire for *His* blood to be upon them was effectively taking upon themselves the blood of the prophets.

Even in this prediction of terrible judgment there is grace. Because the AD70 judgments didn't come until nearly 40 years afterwards. Male lifespans in first century Palestine were estimated at an average of 29 years by J.D. Crossan, basing his research on tomb inscriptions and analysis of bones from graves. So the actual 'elders' who were responsible for the Lord's death likely died in their beds rather than in the Jewish-Roman war or the final holocaust in Jerusalem. I can only explain this on the basis of God's grace prolonging that final coming of judgment, in the earnest hope that Israel would yet repent. In the context of AD70, this would appear to be the teaching of 2 Peter 3. We would expect those men to have fairly soon received their judgment in this life. They will be judged- at the last day. But it would seem that God's desire to judge them was in tension with His desire to give Israel the maximum opportunity for repentance. We can only draw a sharp breath at God's grace. Another approach would be to understand that the threatened judgment upon that generation simply didn't happen- in their lifetimes. The entire Divine program was delayed until the last days, when that generation shall be resurrected and receive their judgment. The events of AD70 were simply a foretaste and prefigurement of the final judgment at the Lord's second coming.

"This generation" is a phrase often used by the Lord concerning those who heard and dealt with Him. It is surely the same generation in view in Mt. 24:34: "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled". *This* generation is used elsewhere by the Lord concerning those right in front of Him. It is the same "this generation" as in Mt. 24:34. The Lord doesn't, therefore, mean 'The future generation which shall exist and see these things will not pass until all is fulfilled'. He is saying that the generation, *this* generation, would not pass until all was fulfilled. The fact all wasn't fulfilled simply in that generation shows that there was a major delay or change in the Divine program. And the reason for the delay was not simply that Israel hadn't repented, but because God's loving patience was still awaiting their repentance- and He so wished them to repent.

11:51 *From the blood of Abel*- If that generation were guilty of Abel's murder, this associates them with Cain. The Jewish false teachers are likened to Cain (1 Jn. 3:12; Jude 11); and the Lord says that the Jews seeking to kill Him are the sons of the one who was a "murderer from the beginning" (Jn. 8:44). Cain was the first murderer.

*To the blood of Zachariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation-* The prophet Zechariah would fit this description, but there's no record of him being murdered. Josephus in *The Jewish War* 4.5.4 speaks of a Zacharias ben Baruch (as in Mt. 23:35) who was assassinated by the Zealots in the Sanhedrin. But he was not a prophet, and this event was still future. And he wasn't killed in the temple. However, there was a prophet Zechariah who was stoned to death in the temple (2 Chron. 24:19-22). He was the son or grandson of Jehoiada, so it's feasible he was the son of a Baruk. The Hebrew Bible ended with 2 Chronicles, and so the mention of this murder would form an appropriate inclusio with the first murder, of Abel. All the murders of the faithful, from the first to the last as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, were going to have their judgment exacted from the generation who crucified God's Son.

11:52 *Woe to you lawyers! For you took away the key of knowledge-*

The Kingdom therefore remained 'locked' to people. We see here that "knowledge" does play a role in coming to the Kingdom. The same figure of the door of the Kingdom being shut [but by the Lord, not men] is found in Mt. 25:10. The similarity is such that we may be intended to understand the foolish virgins are those who were locked out of the Kingdom because of the Pharisees. Their lack of oil, of personal spirituality, was because their religious leaders had not inculcated this in them, nor any sense of their own fallibility and frailty- in that the reason they ended up locked out of the Kingdom was because they had not considered that their oil would likely fail. They had "the key of knowledge" in a spiritually ignorant and illiterate society which depended upon them for knowledge of God's word. Likewise if the elders / judges of Israel had been wise, the entire people would have entered the land (Dt. 16:20). The whole of Israel would've stayed in the wilderness and not entered the Kingdom / land if Gad and Reuben hadn't initially gone over Jordan (Num. 32:15). Wrath would come upon all Israel if the Levites weren't encamped around the tabernacle (Num. 1:53). We really can cause others to not enter God's Kingdom by limiting their access to God's word [a sin of omission], or by making demands on them in the name of His Kingdom which are too heavy for them to bear [a sin of commission]. This imparts an urgency and eternal importance to all our interactions with others. No longer can we see the community of believers as a mere social club, nor the world around us as simply the dead furniture of our lives. We have their salvation or stumbling away from it within our power. This fact also denies us from assuming that whether we fail or not in our interactions with others, God will somehow make good our failures and save others anyway. He has delegated His work into our hands, and to some extent the degree to which it prospers or fails is our responsibility. Otherwise the

whole language of delegation of His wealth into our hands is somehow meaningless.

*You did not enter in yourselves, and those that were entering in, you hindered-* As if they kept locked the door in the face of ones eager to enter the Kingdom. If we believe that we ourselves will be there, we will spark off an upward spiral of positive thinking in the community of believers with whom we are associated. Think carefully on the Lord's words to the Pharisees: "For you neither go in yourselves, neither suffer you them that are entering to go in" (Mt. 23:13). If we don't believe we will be there, we end up discouraging others. There is a sense in which we will enter the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 5:20; "Not every one that says Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom", Mt. 7:21; 18:3; 25:10 s.w.), and yet in another sense we are entering now through the gates ("enter in at the narrow gate", Mt. 7:13; 19:17,24). Our lives now are on a path, a journey, which is entering the Kingdom. The significance of life and living could not be more intense.

The same word for 'hindering' is used about how the disciples 'forbad' children to come to Jesus (Mt. 19:14) and about 'forbidding' baptism (Acts 8:36; 10:47). This is exactly how people can be hindered or not 'allowed' to enter the Kingdom today- by refusing them baptism because of some inadequacy of knowledge or behaviour, or because they are simply felt to be in a category [like "children" were by the disciples] who are inappropriate for the Kingdom. These reflections make us realize that the Pharisees were not a mere phenomenon in history, but have their direct equivalents today.

11:53 *And when he got out from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press upon him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things-* They were experts in winding up a person; they rightly perceived that the Lord had passion and emotion, and they sought to play upon that by a series of provocatively worded questions and statements.

11:54 *Lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say-* The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled or caught up in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9). As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny. They are presented as the robbers on the way to Jericho, lying in wait like bandits.

## CHAPTER 12

12:1 *In the mean time, when the many thousands of the crowd were gathered together, so much so that they trod one upon another, he began to say to his disciples first of all-*

As in the account of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, we get the idea of the Lord purposefully focusing upon the disciples, despite the presence of crowds of well over 10,000. His interest was in developing that small core, rather than getting superficial acceptance from thousands.

*Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy-* The disciples were overly influenced by the Pharisees. They were worried that the Pharisees were not happy with the Lord's teaching (Mt. 15:12). He had to warn them *above all* of the danger of the influence [yeast] of the Pharisees (Lk. 12:1 Gk.). And yet they still misunderstood Him- they thought He was talking about literal bread (Mk. 8:15,16). He encouraged His followers 'be themselves'. He spoke much of not being a *hypokrites*, an actor. Those who follow Him are not to act a part before others, as if all the world's a stage, being what others want in the audience of the world of eyes that surround us, acting as an actor does, merely to please others. He continued the image when He warned of not doing things "to be seen [Gk. *theathenai*] of men". Don't let them be a mere theatre audience to you- be yourself, living life in the constant presence of God's eyes, not man's. This was a major theme with the Lord. Paul likewise teaches us that every man should "be as he is" (1 Cor. 7:26 RV). This is why the Lord Jesus taught His men "first of all", i.e. most importantly, to beware of hypocrisy. This was a cardinal point in Christ's manifesto. We must ask whether it has this place in our discipleship. It can be that the ecclesial audience is a kind of theatre, showing gratitude for the pleasing entertainment of the speakers. Yet the opposite should be true- God is the audience, we are living bared lives before His gaze.

The Lord taught that hypocrisy was like leaven- once it begins in a community of believers, it so easily spreads and engulfs all (Lk. 12:1-3). In this context He went on to say that "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed... whatever you have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light". It is so easy, and we have all done this, to say something about somebody, and ask our hearer not to repeat it. But even in this life, as well as at judgment day, what is spoken in the ear comes out on the housetops. In discussion about fellowship matters, divorce etc. we can so easily say one thing to one group of brethren and something quite different to another. But this, the Lord taught, is hypocrisy. Let us decide our principles and live and speak by them, in humility and sensitivity and simplicity. Because all will be revealed, both in this life and in the coming day of judgment, we ought to be without such hypocrisy.

The Lord taught His followers "first", or 'most of all', to beware of hypocrisy. For us, all the world is *not* to be a stage, and we are *not* to be merely actors upon that stage. Hypocrisy is that living out of a persona, acting, rather than being the person God created us to be. In the Lord Jesus men saw the word made flesh (Jn. 1:14). There was perfect congruence between the person He presented Himself as, and the person He essentially was. This was why He could so easily touch the true person in others. And I think this is the meaning of the otherwise enigmatic insistence that the Cherubim's faces, their appearances, and 'themselves' were all one (Ez. 10:22). The Russian [Synodal] version translates this: 'Their view, was who they themselves were'. So often in our encounters with others there is no real dialogue, rather a conflict of monologues. This is why so many a debate between a Christian and a Mormon, e.g., has come to nothing; for perhaps both of them are merely showing one of their personas.

*12:2 But there is nothing covered up that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known-* See on Mt. 10:27.

Whatever we have spoken in darkness will be revealed for all to hear and know (Lk. 12:2,3)- our words will as it were be cited back to us before others in that day. The Lord says this in the context of warning us not to have the leaven of hypocrisy in the matter of our words- there's no point in saying one thing to one person and something different to someone else, because our words will be gone through at the judgment and will be open for everyone to hear. We should live, He implies, as if we are now before the judgment; speaking things we wouldn't be ashamed for anyone to hear. Note in passing how he says that hypocrisy in our words is like leaven, that corrupts and spreads within an individual and a community. Once somebody starts being hypocritical with their words, someone else does. Even every word of murmuring against each other will be judged; and hence, James points out, it is bizarre that we should be doing this with the judge standing before the door (James 5:9).

*12:3 Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors shall be proclaimed upon the housetops-* The reference to "closets" (AV) takes us back to Mt. 6:6, where He uses the same word to speak of how we should pray in closets and then we will be openly rewarded by the Father. The 'open reward' is clearly in the Kingdom (Mt. 6:4,18; Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13). Could this not be saying, then, that in the Kingdom, the answers to the prayers we are *now* making will be openly proclaimed to all from the housetops? Hence there is an awesome connection between our feeble words of prayer now, and the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom.

"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked (at the second coming): for

there is a time there for every purpose and for every work... for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or bad" (Ecc. 3:17; 12:14). Note the emphasis on "every". Even what we have spoken in the ear will be shouted out (Lk. 12:3) -implying others will somehow observe our judgment, cp. Mt. 12:41. If the judgment is merely a yes/no statement which has been worked out taking our whole life into consideration, then this emphasis on every work having a time for consideration and judgment "there" is pointless. However, these verses must be considered in conjunction with those which speak of God's 'forgetting' of bad deeds on account of how people later chose to live. However, this need not mean that they are erased from God's infinite knowledge; all too often we perceive God's memory as a vast memory bank which can have our sins erased from it. But His knowledge knows no such bounds of human perception; yet He is willing not to hold those things against us, and to therefore count us as having never committed them.

Ultimately, nothing remains secret; at the day of judgment, what we spoke in darkness (i.e. In our own minds) will be heard in the light of God's Kingdom (Lk. 12:3). Note how Paul read the Lord's words here in this way – for he surely alludes here when he speaks of how "the hidden things of darkness" are "the counsels of the hearts" which will be revealed at His return (1 Cor. 4:5). The implications of this are awesome. The thoughts and intents of our hearts in this life will be eternally open and manifest in the eternal light of God's Kingdom. In that day, our brethren will see every one of our hidden thoughts. To live now according to the principle 'I can think what I like, but I won't act like it, for the sake of appearances to others' is therefore foolish. Who we are now in our hearts is whom we shall ultimately be revealed to be. So we may as well get on and act according to how we really think; for throughout eternity, what we think now will be manifest to everyone, seeing that a man *is* as he thinks in his heart.

12:4 *And I say to you my friends-* Assuring them that they had nothing ultimately to fear at the last day; for we are His friends. If we are His friends, the friends of the Son of God, the prince of the kings of the earth- why fear audience response when we witness? The laboured assurances of the next verses about being of more value than sparrows etc. are all in the context, therefore, of assuring us that we need not ultimately fear negative response to our witness.

*Do not be afraid-* The Lord was quite clear that His followers should expect death and serious suffering for preaching Him. He perceived that fear of audience response would be a strong factor in the temptation not to preach Him. But He gave the reason for not fearing in :3- all shall be revealed at the day of judgment. Belief in the doctrine of final judgment

therefore has huge impact upon life in practice- in this case, giving us strength not to fear the consequences of our witness. For many believers today, persecution unto death is not a likely consequence of witness; fear of slight embarrassment, being thought 'odd' for turning a conversation around, is a very small price. The Lord is asking us here to accept that witness for Him may well cost us death. If we accept that, accept it as part and parcel of the Lord's basic message, then our approach to witness will be quite different. Fear of audience response will no longer be a major factor, if we have solemnly accepted that we are prepared to die for the sake of preaching the Gospel.

*Of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do-* Mt. 10:28 adds: "But are not able to kill the soul". "They" cannot touch our essential self. It is our 'real self' which will eternally endure. In this sense, for the faithful, their body may be killed but their soul cannot be. I take this to mean that who they essentially are is for ever recorded by the Lord, and they will be given that same personality at the resurrection. Significantly, the Bible speaks not of the 'resurrection of the body' [it's the creeds which speak of this], but rather "the resurrection of the just", "the resurrection of the dead". The resurrection is more about resurrected characters than resurrected bodies, although the process will involve a new body being given.

12:5 *But I will warn you about whom you shall fear. Fear Him, who after He has killed has power to cast you into Gehenna. Yes, I say to you, fear Him!*- The fear of the eternity we might miss, condemnation, is to be infinitely greater than our fear of death in this life. The Jews believed that 'hell' had three sections: Gehenna, a place of eternal fire for those Jews who broke the covenant and blasphemed God; 'the shades', an intermediate place similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory; and a place of rest where the faithful Jew awaited the resurrection at the last day. This distinction has no basis in the Bible. However, it's significant that the Lord Jesus uses 'Gehenna' and the figure of eternal fire to describe the punishment of people for what the Jews of His day would've considered incidental sins, matters which were far from blasphemy and breaking the covenant - glancing at a woman with a lustful eye (Mk. 9:47), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1,5; Mt. 23:27-33), not giving a cup of water to a "little one", forbidding a disciple of John the Baptist to follow Jesus (Mk. 9:39-43); not preaching the Gospel fearlessly and boldly (Mt. 10:25-28). These matters were and are shrugged off as of no eternal consequence. But just like the prophets of Israel did, the Lord Jesus seizes upon such issues and purposefully associates them with the most dire possible punishment which His Jewish hearers could conceive - Gehenna. Time and again, the Bible alludes to incorrect ideas and reasons with people from the temporary assumption those ideas might be true. The language of demons, as we will show later, is a classic example. And it's quite possible the Lord is doing the same here with the concept of Gehenna - the

punishment for the Jew who breaks the covenant and blasphemes. The Lord was primarily teaching about behaviour, not giving a lecture about the state of the dead. And so He takes the maximum category of eternal punishment known to His audience, and says that this awaits those who sin in matters which on His agenda are so major, even if in the eyes of the Jewish world and humanity generally they were insignificant.

12:6 *Are not five sparrows sold for two very small coins? And not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God-* See on Mt. 10:29. Two sparrows were sold for one coin; and five were given for two coins. The sparrows were so little worth that one was thrown in for free. Yet the sparrows are represented in the presence of God (Gk.); even animals have their representative Angels there. This is 'how' in one sense a personal God sees and knows all things; because His Spirit / Angels are in His presence reporting all things to Him. At least this is how we are invited to perceive it. The sparrows aren't forgotten in the presence of God, and we are of more value than many sparrows (Lk. 12:6,7); Matthew has: 'Your Father feeds the sparrows; are you not of more value [same Greek as in Luke] than many sparrows?'; 'no sparrow falls to the ground without your Father knowing... you are of more value than many sparrows' (Mt. 6:26; 10:29,31). The sparrows being in God's presence is paralleled with His feeding them [Gk. 'to bring them up'] and being aware of what is happening to them on earth. God feeds / raises the sparrows through His Angelic messengers.

"An inscription of the Emperor Diocletian setting out the maximum prices that might be paid for various articles of commerce shows that sparrows were the cheapest of birds used for food..." (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Leicester: I.V.P., 1992)). This is another example of the Lord's radical collision course with the Rabbis; He taught that God's care even embraces sparrow. For the Rabbis explicitly forbade prayers that mentioned God's care for birds, because they argued that it was dishonouring to God to associate Him with something so small as a bird (*Berith* 5.3). And the Lord purposefully stood that idea upon its head. The Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think

twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others...

*12:7 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered-* The redeemed are a community whom man cannot number (Rev. 7:9), as many as the stars in the sky which neither Abraham nor any man could number. The Lord may be making an allusion to this in order to highlight the scale of knowledge which God has- He numbers the community of believers exactly, over space and over time, and He also numbers the hairs on every one of His people. This vast knowledge of God is often referred to in the Psalms as a guarantee that therefore God will ultimately protect His people. Lk. 21:18, which we have shown to have similarities with the preaching commission of Mt. 10, comments that "there shall not an hair of your head perish". The question is whether the Lord is assuring His preachers that they will not ultimately die; it might sound like it, from such assurance. And yet earlier verses in the preaching commission sound as if the preachers will indeed suffer, quite possibly unto death. And we know that some of them did suffer death. So what are we to make of these assurances of protection, so strong that the preacher should be fearless and not fear death as a consequence for preaching? I suggest that the Lord, as often in His teaching, is speaking on an elevated, spiritual level. The possibility of death for witness is a clear theme of His, especially in Revelation. These strong assurances of protection and salvation from death would therefore be His way of saying that His ultimate salvation of His preachers at the resurrection will involve the preservation of them as unique personalities, down to the hairs of their head. And therefore they should not fear death in this life. For He knows them. The fear of death revolves around the sense that I as the sum of all my experiences, my uniqueness, shall be no more- and the Lord is urging us to believe that God not only knows our unique attributes better than we do, but shall ultimately preserve them in the resurrection of the body and in the nature of the life eternal.

*Fear not!*- The Lord is asking a lot here; He's asking for us to preach without fear of consequence and audience reaction. That is a step beyond preaching knowing the likely price, and being willing to pay that price. To know that price and yet preach without fear is a step beyond being willing to accept consequence.

*You are of more value than many sparrows-* The same word is used in the same context in Mt. 6:26. Having spoken of how God provides for the birds of the air, the Lord drives home the comparison: "Are you not much better [s.w. "of more value"] than them?". The term is again used in Mt. 12:12: "How much then is a man better than a sheep". We must give full weight to this triple emphasis on how much more valuable we are than the mortal animals whom God is so careful for. The request that we do

not fear is repeated and laboured throughout the section. It is fear of what others think and may do which so often holds us back from witness, be it to family members or literally approaching people on the street. With such laboured assurances, we are to overcome fear and therefore confess Him openly (:8).

12:8 *And I say to you, every one who shall confess me before men-* Confessing Christ before men can also be an allusion to baptism, not just bucking up the courage to give someone a tract at work (Rom. 10:9,10). This allusion is confirmed when we realize that "confess" translates two Greek words, 'to confess in'. We confess in Christ by baptism into Him. In another sense, our witness is because we are in Christ, we are Him to the world, and therefore His fearlessness unto death in witness should be ours. The Lord spoke of how if we confess Him before men, He will confess knowledge of us before the Father; and if we deny Him, He will deny us. This language is applied by John to John the Baptist- for he comments that John the Baptist "confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ" (Jn. 1:20). In this sense, John Baptist is being set up as our example in preaching- and again, John comments that we too are to confess the Son and not deny Him (1 Jn. 2:23), after the pattern of John the Baptist. And yet note what John's 'confession' was- it was a profession of his unworthiness, that although he was the herald of the Christ, he was not Jesus. Again, we see here a pattern for our witness to the Lord. Eph. 6:15 speaks of our each being 'sandaled' with the preparation of the Gospel. Who prepared the way of the Lord by preaching, wearing sandals? John the Baptist. It seems Paul is alluding to John here, setting him up as the preacher's example. The reference to "loins girt" (Eph. 6:14) would also be a John allusion- the record twice (in Mt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6) stresses how John had his 'loins girded'.

*Him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God-* See on Mt. 10:32; Lk. 13:8; 1 Tim. 5:21. So close are the Lord and the Angels and such His respect and love for them, that it seems that Jesus will even feel ashamed or embarrassed before them when He comes to consider one of the unworthy at the day of judgement- Luke 12:8 implies that the same feeling of embarrassment and shame which the unworthy have now when backing out of preaching will be felt by Jesus when He looks on them at the judgement. And it is quite possible that one of the things which motivated our Lord to continue hanging on the cross was the thought of praising God in the midst of the Angels at His ascension: "My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation (of Angels?): I will pay my vows before them that fear Him".

But in the same way as the Angels minister condemnation, they also joyfully give eternal life to their faithful charges, on Christ's command at

the judgement- "him shall the Son of man also confess before the Angels of God" (Luke 12:8). This is perhaps the fact alluded to in 2 Cor. 10:18: "not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends (at the judgement)". To be commended implies to be commended *to* somebody- the Angels?

When He says He will confess *us* before the Father, He means He will confess *our name* before God (Rev. 3:5); He knows us according to our names / characters. He speaks of ecclesial members as "names" in Rev. 3:4; He calls His own sheep by name, and they each know His voice, responding to His word *individually*. The call to one sheep will only be recognized by that sheep; the others won't respond (Jn. 10:3). He will take individual note of each sheep, treating them accordingly, as the shepherd leads more gently those that are with young (Is. 40:11). It seems that even now, we each have our own individual name with the Father and Son, encompassing their understanding of our essential character. It may even be that in the record of Scripture, God inspired the writers to record the names of individuals according to His judgment of them (or at least, how the faithful viewed them at the time), rather than by the names they actually went under. What mother would have named her child Nabal (fool), or Ahira (brother of evil, Num. 1:15), or 'sickness' or 'wasting' (Mahlon and Chilion)? These names were either given to them by others and the use adopted by God, or simply God in the record assigned them such names.

The same two words for "confess [in]" are found in Rom. 10:9 "If you shall *confess with* your mouth the Lord Jesus... you shall be saved". The idea of *homolegeo* seems to be of public confession; literally to *homo-logos*. The Lord uses the word *logos* with reference to the "words" of our preaching before men (Mt. 10:14). *Homo* has the sense of being together with others. It can carry the sense of 'assent', in that our *logos* comes together with the *logos* of another; but the majority of NT usage is clearly with the sense of professing, making our *logos* before others. At the day of judgment, the Lord will "profess" His verdict to men (Mt. 7:23) and here we learn that He will "profess" it to His Father too. The weight of evidence on the basis of usage is that this word refers to public profession of a *logos*, of our innermost thought- which is exactly in line with the themes of the Lord's teaching here: that our internal thought and position, our *logos*, is crucially important; but if it is a Christ-like *logos* then it will be impossible to conceal it, it must naturally become public, for a city set on a hill cannot be hid. Consider the evidence:

- Herod *confessed* [AV "promised"] with an oath" in front of witnesses to give Herodias' daughter whatever she wished (Mt. 14:7)
- John the Baptist *confessed* in his preaching (Jn. 1:20)
- If anyone *confessed* openly that Jesus was Messiah, then they would be cast out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22; 12:42)
- The Pharisees *confessed* their doctrinal positions, i.e. they openly taught

them (Acts 23:8)

- Paul *confessed* his beliefs publicly when on trial (Acts 24:14)
- Timothy *confessed* his confession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12)
- Some openly *confess* their knowledge of God when their private lives don't match that public confession (Titus 1:16)
- The faithful *confessed* their faith in God's promises before all (Heb. 11:13)
- Teachers *confess* a doctrinal position about Jesus in their teaching and must be assessed by their audience accordingly (1 Jn. 2:23; 4:2,3,15; 2 Jn. 7).

According to the Lord's teaching here, he who refuses to make this public profession will not be accepted in the day of judgment; the Lord Jesus will not confess such a person before "My Father". Rom. 10:9,10 likewise predicate salvation upon this public confession. And the contrast in Matthew 10:32,33 is between *confessing* Christ and *denying* Him before men, leading to being *denied* by Jesus before "My Father". Without doubt, 1 Jn. 2:23 has all this in mind when teaching that "Whosoever *denies* the Son, the same has not *the Father*, but he that *confesses* [s.w.; AV "acknowledges"] the Son has the Father also". Taken together, these usages of *confession* present a solid case- that salvation is related to public confession. That is not to say that salvation is by works, nor is it to say that evangelism is the be all and end all of the Christian life- after all, we all have different gifts, some are more pastoral than evangelical. Salvation is by grace *through faith*; and if we believe, then we cannot be passive, we become a city set on a hill which cannot be hid. Otherwise, as the Lord teaches several times in the Sermon on the Mount, we have not really believed in God's grace. The Sermon teaches that there is no such thing as a secret Christian, a candle lit which nobody else sees or gets a hint of. In this area particularly, we are faced with the temptation of sins of omission- to consider that we are believers because we have mentally assented to certain theological propositions about Christ, but not making any public commitment or confession about them. No wonder the Lord raised this theme in encouraging His preachers to go forth fearlessly.

12:9 *But he that denies me*- The whole purpose of the true church is to be a light to the world- "the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members", as William Temple put it. The Lord will tell some in the last day that He never knew them, He will deny them; and yet He will deny those who never confessed Him before men (Mt. 8:23; 10:32,33). These people will have prophesied in His Name [i.e. preached to the ecclesia], and done "mighty works" for Him; but the fact they didn't confess Him before men is seen as not knowing Him; for to know Him is to perceive that we are intended to confess Him before men. This, perhaps, is our greatest danger. The presence and witness of God is no longer in a tent in the Sinai, nor in a Jerusalem temple. God reveals Himself through the group of ordinary, mixed up folks who comprise the

ecclesias. For the watching world, we present proof that Christ is indeed alive; we provide the visible shape of what God and Jesus are really like. This is how vital is the matter of witness. It is utterly fundamental to the whole purpose behind our having been called. If we deny Christ, we deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22); and yet we deny Christ if we don't preach Him (Mt. 10:33). It follows that if we really believe that Jesus was not just Jesus of Nazareth but the Christ of God, therefore we won't deny Him but will preach Him. This is why there is connection between confessing Jesus as Christ and preaching Him (Jn. 9:22; Acts 18:5; Phil. 2:11). A grasp of who the Lord Jesus really is and the height of His present exaltation will naturally result in a confession of Him to the world, as well as a deep personal obedience to His word and will (Heb. 2:1).

There are at least three Biblical examples of people denying Jesus- the same Greek word is used- and yet repenting. Peter denied the Lord "before all" (Mt. 26:70), and yet was restored. The entire crowd around Jesus, including the healed woman, initially 'denied' they had touched Jesus (Lk. 8:45); but the woman then came out into the open and confessed Christ before all. The Jews 'denied' Christ (Acts 3:13,14) but then repented and were baptized publicly. The point is, that in the moments when we deny Him, He denies us; but we can change the situation.

It's tempting to wonder whether all this talk of confession and denial is only really relevant to those standing trial for their Christian faith, with the threat of death before them and the possibility of saving their life if they make some symbolic denial of Christ. But the words for confessing and denying occur together in Tit. 1:16 about those within the ecclesia who "Profess [s.w. 'confess'] that they know God, but in works *deny* Him". We can make the profession of faith before men, and in the public confession of baptism- whilst effectively denying the faith in our lives. There were some within the ecclesias of the first century who 'denied' the Lord (2 Pet. 2:1). External membership can appear as 'confession', but the point is that it isn't necessarily. It can actually be a front for denial of Him...

*In the presence of men shall be denied in the presence of the angels of God-* The Lord Jesus in the last day will confess, or witness to in a legal sense, for His people "before the angels of God" (Lk. 12:8,9); and yet He uses the same language to describe how right now, He confesses us in Heaven in the presence of His Father (Mt. 10:32). Thus when we witness- or don't witness- to our relationship with Him, the Lord Jesus either confesses or denies knowledge of us before His Father. Right now. And this, therefore, is a foretaste of the final judgment. And we face these foretastes day by day in human life, as we encounter the choices of confessing or denying our Lord.

There is a direct correlation between our attitudes to witnessing before men now, and the attitude of the Lord Jesus about us in Heaven "before", or 'before the face of', the Father. Witnessing is essentially personal, each of us individually "before men". As modern life progresses in reducing relationships to online abstractions, we must remember this. An individual may press the right keys on their keyboard, send money online to a preaching organization- and yet never be making any witness about Christ before the faces of men. Indeed, those with whom the person does have face to face relationships may well be totally unaware he is a Christian. It's this kind of thing which the Lord is addressing in such demanding terms- our witness *before men*, not in some anonymous world of avatars, is related to how we witness about us *before the face of God in Heaven*.

So whoever denies the Lord before men will be denied before the Angels. Two words are used here, the first weaker than the second. If we deny Jesus, He will utterly deny us before the Angels- what we do now on earth is even more strongly reflected in Heaven and at judgment day. The Heavenly response to our words and actions is out of proportion to our words. This surely inspires us in our daily words and decisions.

12:10 *And everyone who shall speak a word against the Son of Man-* The sin of stating that Jesus was Satan's agent rather than God's could not be forgiven whilst it continued to be the position of a person- although repentance was always possible. For those who had accepted Jesus as God's unique agent, they can be forgiven all manner of failure, including speaking "a word" against Him. Maybe the Lord foresaw the situations in which persecution could be avoided for an apparently few words calling Him accursed. And He, along with Matthew, wanted to assure those who would do this in the weakness of a moment that in fact they had *not* blasphemed the Spirit and were not beyond forgiveness. The 'speaking against' is clearly parallel to 'blaspheming'. Blaspheming the name of Jesus was and is required by various anti-Christian regimes such from Judaism through the Roman empire to fundamentalist Islamic states today. Surely the Lord had this in mind. And the encouragement is that this is forgivable. But to decide He is not the Son of God but the embodiment of evil is a situation for which there is no forgiveness because it is wilfully continued in. The Lord has just stated that whoever is not with Him is against Him (:30), but here He foresees a situation when one of those who is ultimately 'with Him' will speak 'against Him'- and yet be forgiven. Because that moment of failure was not the overall position of a man's life. The denials by Peter, replete with curses / blasphemy, would surely be the parade example.

The "son of man" here could refer to the Lord Jesus, but it could just as comfortably mean 'human beings'. One angle on this passage is to remember that the Gospels were written as a means of preaching to

Jewish people at some point after the Lord's resurrection. The message may be: 'Whatever sin you committed against Jesus, even to the point of crucifixion, is forgivable. But now the Holy Spirit is witnessing to you through the apostles to repent and accept His forgiveness. If you refuse *that*, then there will [obviously] be no forgiveness for you'. The Lord foresaw the situation as it would be in the lives of his audience, and that explains His language here.

*It shall be forgiven him, but to him that blasphemes against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven-* Whenever we sin, we are judged by the court of Heaven as deserving condemnation. Yet now is our day of opportunity; the verdict really is given, but we can mercifully change it. Consider the implications of the parallel Mk. 3:29: "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness but is in danger of *eternal* damnation". Not being *ever* forgiven is paralleled with having *eternal* damnation. The implication is that when we sin and are unforgiven, we are condemned. But in this life we can be forgiven, and therefore become uncondemned. Abimelech was "but a dead man" for taking Sarah (Gen. 20:3), as if although he was alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation.

12:11 *And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious how or what you shall answer, or what you shall say-* The Lord wanted His truth to be witnessed by His people to the authorities in "heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). The Lord wanted to give even kings and rulers the chance of repentance. We too should not consider anyone anywhere beyond The legal language suggests that a court case was going on- in the court of Heaven, situations on earth are tried, and the witness of the apostles at their earthly court cases against *them* was used in the court case *against the rulers* which was going on in Heaven.

12:12 *For the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what you should say-* Luke's later volume records how indeed this happened to the persecuted apostles (Acts 4:8; 6:10; 7:2,53,55 and throughout the trials of Paul). But there is a very clear application to the events of the very last days, which the run up to AD70 prefigured. The allusion is to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say". This persecution lead to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. All these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. The gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev.11:6).

Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the three and a half year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution.

12:13 *And one out of the crowd said to him: Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me-* The Lord replies by asking the man to think again about *who* had given Jesus authority- for if indeed God really had given Jesus authority, then the man ought *himself* to fear the judgment of Jesus- for as the Lord goes on to show in the parable of the rich fool, He has the power to reject those who are materialistic, exactly because He has such authority from God. The Lord is pushing the man to look at himself and think of himself at the end of his life and before the final day of judgment; and to cease paying a mere lip service respect to the authority of Jesus, but to take this for real, realizing what it means for his own personal responsibility.

The Lord's response was to tell the parable of the rich fool- a parable which ought to be seriously worrying for every one of us, rich or poor. He put the immediate argument between the brothers in the perspective of eternity; the eternity we may miss because we got too distracted with the immediate argument of the moment. And the Lord's basic message in this case was: "Be rich toward God. Give Him whatever you have". This cut right across the issues of life's unfairness, missing out on wealth, not getting our share of respect... to the essential question which should have made both brothers feel uncomfortable. Had they, have we, given all they had to the Lord's cause? We may lack the quick thinking or penetrating analysis required to make this kind of fast response when confronted by others' conflicts. But we can surely analyse our own conflicts, at our own pace, in the light of eternity; and regain perspective, even if our opponent fails to do this. We need to cut to the essence of why we are feeling as we are; pray for God to help you in this, for accurate self-examination is so hard. If we don't connect and engage with the core issues, then even if the immediate problem [e.g. the argument about the inheritance] is resolved, then other issues will still then arise. It will only be a matter of time. The more we focus on resolving just one conflict, the more we will realize that in fact we are dealing with a tangled web of multiple conflicts. We cannot change others, but we can come to understand ourselves, and to define and engage with the essential issues which we personally face in the whole conflict.

12:14 *But he said to him: Man! Who made me a judge or a divider over you?-* As noted on :13, this is not to be read as meaning 'I am not your judge, why ever would you think that?'. The answer to this rhetorical question is 'God'. The man was to quit worrying about material issues and

conflicts with his brother, and focus instead on his relationship with God. The Father and Son will indeed judge and divide between men at the last day- but on the basis of spiritual and not secular things. The ultimate judgment and division between men will be made on the basis of how they have handled such issues of judgment and division in their secular lives; and seeing we need His absolute grace in the time of the final judgment and division, we need to show it now. All such conflicts with our brethren are therefore a dry run of judgment day; we make the answer now. Note too the allusion to Ex. 2:14, whereby the Lord presents Himself as a new Moses.

12:15 *And he said to them: Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness. For a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses-* See on Lk. 17:32. As noted on :13 and :14, the true life is that to come, and that will be predicated upon how far in this life we have judged and divided rightly with secular issues now. The Lord seeks to prize apart the connection between a person and their possessions; a connection which has become the dogma of our materialistic age. The life, the personality, is to be seen as of paramount importance; 'Who "am" I?' is to be the question we return to time and again in our self-examination. The way of naming houses and lands in the name of the owner indicates the chronic degree of identification between possessions and personhood which there is in so many minds. But we are to make a great divorce in our minds between who we really are, and what we possess.

12:16 *And he spoke a parable to them, saying: The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully-* The aorist could imply that the ground was about to bring forth plentifully. The way the man talks about building bigger barns in order to store his "goods" suggests he is fantasizing about wealth, about actually getting a large harvest and turning it into goods; to spend time and labour demolishing existing barns and building greater when the intensity of harvest is upon him is foolish, and suggests an unreal fantasy about wealth rather than reality. Likewise his assumption that his harvest would be so huge that he could live from it for the rest of his life... is perhaps somewhat unrealistic.

12:17 *And he reasoned within himself, saying: What shall I do, because I do not have anywhere to store my crops?-* Jesus pinpointed the crucial importance of self-talk in this parable of the rich fool, who said to himself that he had many goods, and discussed with his own "soul" or self the need for greater barns etc. If we at least realize that our self-talk is potentially our greatest adversary ['Satan'], then we will find the strength to move towards genuine spiritual mindedness, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

"What shall I / we do?" is a question which keeps occurring in the Gospels and Acts. It is one of those phrases which flies out of the text, forcing us to engage with it and to ask ourselves the same question (Mt. 20:32; 21:40; 27:22; Mk. 10:17; Jn. 6:28; 11:47). And especially in Luke: 3:10,12,14 [the whole account of the gospel begins with people being forced to ask this question]; 10:25; 12:17; 16:3,4; 18:18,41; 20:13,15. And Luke brings the question to a head when the crowds ask Peter: "What shall we do?", and the same question is on the lips of the repentant Saul (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 10:6; 22:10). The answer of course is to repent and be baptized. But the rich fool ignored that and identified himself with his possessions (:15), and answered accordingly.

12:18 *And he said: This will I do. I will pull down my barns and build greater ones, and there will I store all my grain and my goods-* The Greek phrase for bestowing / gathering / storing into barns is to be found in Mt. 3:12; 13:30; Lk. 3:17- every time in the context of gathering God's people into God's Kingdom. This is what he should have been doing with his time and wealth. The barn represents the Kingdom. The man should've sought the things of God's Kingdom or barn, rather than his own, trying to build his own fake Kingdom here on earth (: 31). As noted on :17, the answer to the question "What shall I do?" ought to have been to devote himself to the Lord.

Solomon's obsession with building the temple and his own houses shows a massive attraction towards material things. Ecc. 2 chronicles how he crazily tried to accumulate every branch of material possession. Solomon figuratively chastised the people with whips in the form of the excessive tax he raised in order to build store cities (1 Kings 9:15,19), in which to store all his accumulation. Surely this is behind the Lord's parable of the rich fool, devoid of wisdom in practice, who built ever bigger barns because of his lack of understanding about the future Kingdom. The Hebrew for "store cities" (2 Chron.8:6) is also translated "to heap up", strengthening the connection with the rich fool (Lk. 12:15-28). That parable stresses the self-centredness of the fool- just circle all the occurrences of the word "I". A similar over-use of personal pronouns in Ecc.2:4-8 makes the same point. Ecc.2:26 records how Solomon reflected that the sinner "heaped up" treasures- using the same word as for his "store cities". He saw his error, but wasn't bothered to do anything about it.

12:19 *And I will say to my soul: Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years-* see on Mt. 6:25; 1 Cor. 15:32. The rich fool reasoned that because he had had a big harvest, he would build bigger barns and relax, because he had enough to last him "many years" (Lk. 12:18,19). The unreal element here is that a harvest doesn't last many years, especially in a Middle Eastern climate with no way of effectively preserving it. And

the lesson, on reflection, is obvious. Riches don't last for ever, he who earns big wages puts them into a bag with holes in... and yet there is the genuine conviction that they will last much longer than they do. Another unreal element here is that the rich man is described as speaking *with himself*. It's hard for some cultures to appreciate how Middle Eastern culture is a collective affair. Decisions are taken through much discussion with other people. Likewise, the rich man plans out how to enjoy his wealth *alone*. There is no speech to his family; he invites *himself* to rejoice with *himself*. But all these unreal elements about this man signpost to us the loneliness, insulation and selfishness which is brought about by excess wealth and the increase of investments. It's so relevant to the 21st century. By the way, there's a word play going on here. The man whose land brings forth many things (*eu-phoreo*) and therefore wants to be merry (*eu-phraino*) is actually a fool- *aphron*- an *a-phron* person, a person without those things. All those things were "required" of him, as a loan is required. They weren't really his. And as so often, the parable is left hanging, with no actual response from the man. We have to imagine where the man's mind turned, what he thought... and take the lesson.

*Take your ease, eat, drink, be merry-* A direct quotation from Epicurean philosophers. The Lord is directly engaging with secular ideas current at the time. But no quotation marks or used, nor acknowledgment of sources given. Many of the Bible's 'difficult passages' are because of these kinds of allusions to contemporary phrases, ideas and literature, many of which are not preserved today.

For each aspect of true spirituality, there is a fake counterpart; an appearance of peace when a man has no peace with God; a semblance of prayer and Bible study when actually these are performed as exercises devoid of meaning. The pseudo-believer takes "ease" (Lk. 12:19) in his materialism; and yet this is the same word used about the true "rest" which the Lord gives in His ecclesia (Mt. 11:28). If we allow ourselves to be caught up in this, then we are effectively having our part in the spirit of antiChrist. There will not only be a fake Jesus, but there is already within our natures a shadow spirituality, which apes the real thing, and thereby seeks to persuade us that we can take the crown without the cross. In this lies the colossal practical relevance of this theme to the serious believer.

12:20 *But God said to him: You foolish one, this night is your soul required from you, and the things which you have prepared, whose shall they be?*- Gk. / RVmg. "They shall require of thee"- i.e. the Angels, to whom we shall give account at the day of judgment (:9). A similar, related Greek word is in :48- as God has given much to us, so "they"- the Angels- will require of us during the judgment process. But the exact same Greek word translated "required" occurs only in Lk. 6:30- we should

give to others and not 'ask again' of them. The connection teaches that insofar as we 'require' of others, so it will be 'required' of us. If we forgive freely without demanding repentance, so God will treat us; if we 'require again' of others in this life, so God will of us. In a sense our lives are required of us when we die in that our next conscious moment will be the judgment.

This is an allusion to various passages from the Apocrypha, especially Ecclesiasticus- as noted on :19, the Lord is again engaging with contemporary ideas.

"Prepared" is the same word as "prepared" in v. 47. We must prepare ourselves, our character and personality; we provide or prepare by being generous to others, v. 33. Because we do not have an immortal soul that is somehow recycled into us through reincarnation, our soul / life is given to us by God. In the parable of the rich fool, the Lord says that in the day of his death, his soul was "required" of him. The Greek word for 'required' means 'to ask back, to request to be given again'. The fact we have life [a 'soul'] makes us responsible to God; and at the judgment we will be asked to give that life back to Him with an account. And, as the parable shows, this utterly precludes a focus upon material acquisition. The Lord goes on to say that therefore we should take no anxious thought about what our soul will eat or wear- because our soul / life is in fact God's soul / life, and He will care for it until He takes it back to Himself (Lk. 12:22). The soul is greater than food and clothes (Lk. 12:23 Gk.). The wonder that we are alive, with God's life in us, should be far greater to us than what we feed or clothe it with. Because we can't take that life out of ourselves until God does, nor can we give it to another person, nor can we make our body / soul grow taller, *therefore* we should not take anxious thought for the material things related to it, which are all peripheral compared to the wonder of the fact that we have life from God: "why take ye thought for the rest [Gk. 'the things that are left over / extraneous']?" (Lk. 12:26). And to drive the point home, we are bidden "consider" (s.w. 'discover') the birds and plants, who are simply content with the life God has given them. This was the Lord's way of doing what Solomon did in Ecc. 3:17-20- showing that man and plants and animals are all possessed of the same God-given spirit / life. As Gen. 2:7; Ecc. 12:7 make clear, the spirit / life is given by God to our bodies; it doesn't come from anywhere else. There is no reincarnation. And this is no painless Bible fact; it demands that we live lives that are *His*, and not lived out as if our spirit / life / soul is *ours*. The fact that God "holdeth our soul in life", a reference to Gen. 2:7, means that David wanted to "make the voice of his praise to be heard" (Ps. 66:8,9). This was the meaning of the basic facts of creation for David!

The man who built greater barns realized on the night of his death that all his laid up treasures could not be his after his death. And yet this is couched in the very language of Ecclesiastes. We can come to that attitude and understanding right now; and if we don't, we will come to it on our deathbeds or at judgment day. The parable of the pounds may be intended to describe our dealing with wealth. This is how it would have appeared to the Lord's first hearers.

12:21 *So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God-* Without in any way seeking to teach justification by works, it is also true that there are Bible passages which imply that there will be a reckoning up of a man's good works at the last day. The rich fool should have been "rich toward God" (Lk. 12:21); he should have hoarded up spiritual wealth and fruit against his last day rather than material things. Yet this of course will not have been consciously done; yet the judgment process will reveal the good works of the righteous to them and others.

"Rich towards" is a phrase only used elsewhere in Rom. 10:12, where Paul observes that the Lord is "rich towards" all believers. The fool had failed to perceive God's richness, or generosity, towards him; and so he was rich towards, or generous to, himself rather than God.

12:22 *And he said to his disciples: Therefore I say to you, do not be anxious for life, what you shall eat. Nor yet for your body, what you shall put on-* This is all building up to the momentous challenge of :33 to sell what we have and give to the poor. The allusion is to how God provided food and clothing for Israel as they journeyed through the desert to the promised land.

The Lord' teaching is concerned with how we think, with inculcating spiritual mindedness. The exhortations in this section against materialism arise out of that- they are appeals not to be materialistic and faithless in God's provision, because this leads to our thinking, our heart and mind, being on those things rather than with the Lord. It's true that the Greek translated 'thought' can mean 'no *anxious* thought'. But the problem is that we can make this mean that we are in fact allowed to spend a lot of time thinking about material things, so long as we're not 'anxious'. This line of interpretation seems to ignore the wider context. We can be spiritually minded, the Lord is teaching, if we simply accept that we shall never go hungry or naked. God will provide for His children who trust in Him. The Lord clearly saw material concerns as being the great enemy of daily spiritual mindedness. The emphasis upon not taking thought is considerable- the Lord uses the word five times in swift succession (Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34). And He repeats the command not to take thought for what we shall eat or drink (Mt. 6:25,31). Luke's record records this warning not to worry about what we shall 'eat and drink' only once (Lk.

12:29), but it is prefaced by the parable of the rich fool, upon whose lips we find the same words. After he has spent a lifetime amassing wealth, he says to himself "eat, drink and be merry" (Lk. 12:19). Clearly we are to understand him as a man who failed to live by the Lord's principles not to worry about eating and drinking. Yet he was not poor. He was fabulously rich. The point is thus established that the rich, or at least those who have enough to eat and drink, are not to consider the Lord's principle as speaking only to the desperately poor who are tempted to worry about what they shall eat. The principle applies to the rich too. For it is a basic human principle that all of us, rich or poor, are tempted to expend mental thought about how we shall basically survive. The omission of the Sermon in John is typical of how John omits much of the Synoptic material, and yet repeats it in essence. He records the same 'eat and drink' language about our need eat and drink of the flesh and blood of the crucified Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:53). The point perhaps is that instead of expending mental energy worrying about how we shall eat and drink, we are to instead focus upon absorbing the Lord Jesus into our lives. And all material things will somehow fall into place. A similar idea is to be found in the Lord's warning not to worry about what clothing to "put on", because He uses the same word about how the rejected man had not 'put on' the wedding garment of the Lord's righteousness (Mt. 22:11). Repeatedly the later New Testament appeals for us to "put on [s.w.] the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 13:12,14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; 6:11,14; Col. 3:10,12; 1 Thess. 5:8), so that in the last day we may 'put on' the clothing of immortality (s.w. 1 Cor. 15:53,54; 2 Cor. 5:3). If putting on *this* garment is our mental focus, then we need not worry about what we shall 'put on' for clothing in this life. This is alluded to in Phil. 4:6. How do we obey that command to "take no thought for your life"? By praying consciously for every little thing that you need in daily life, e.g. daily bread. We do not have two masters; only one. Therefore, the more we grasp this, the more we will give ourselves solely to Him. And this leads on, in the thinking of Jesus, to having no anxious thought for tomorrow; for a life of total devotion to Him means that we need not worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:24,25). If we seek first His Kingdom, then we will not be anxious for tomorrow (Mt. 6:33,34).

12:23 *For the life is more than the food, and the body more than the clothing-* I noted on :15 that the Lord is teaching us to make a radical divorce between our life and our possessions. The presence of the articles focuses attention upon *the* life and *the* body- and surely the Lord has in view the life to come, which will involve having a glorious *body* (Phil. 3:21), not existence in any disembodied sense. The contrast is therefore between this present life, and *the* life to come; this present body, and *the* body which is to be given us. It's a question of identification; whether we focus upon this present life and body, or perceive that this life is but a miniscule percentage of our eternal existence, when we will not be living this life with this body. The life and the body to come are "more" than the

present life and body; and the Greek for "more" is elsewhere translated 'the greater part', the idea being 'the major portion'. The vastly greater part of our existence will be with *the* life and *the* body which is yet to come. If we are secure in Christ and confident of our eternal destiny by His grace, then issues pertaining to this life and this body become insignificant.

When the Lord taught that "the life is more than the food" which we worry about today (Lk. 12:23 RV), and "the body [which we shall receive] is more than the raiment", He surely means that our hope of eternal life, *the* life, the only real and ultimate life worth having, should eclipse our worries about today's problems of survival. Not worrying about food, drink and clothing, which God will provide, is likely an allusion to His provision for Israel during their wilderness journey to the promised land. And in this context the Lord encourage us: "Seek ye the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you... fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. 12:31,32). If it is God's pleasure to give us the Kingdom, then surely He will give us all basic necessities until that time comes. Our certainty of being there thus greatly relieves us from earthly cares, compared to the person who has no such hope.

12:24 *Consider the ravens, how they do not sow nor reap. They have no store nor barn, but God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!*- Gk. 'gaze into'. Surely He drew attention to some birds flying around. And the Greek words behind "Behold" mean more than a casual glance. He asks us to look for some time with deep penetration at the birds of the natural creation, and learn a lesson.

As always, the Lord applied His words to Himself. For we sense in Mt. 8:20 that He had really thought about His words. Yes, the Father feeds the birds- but they have nests, and the Son of Man at least that night had nowhere to lay His head. Note too that the birds of the air are generally unclean (Acts 10:12). The fact God feeds even the unclean animals ties in with the Lord's opening comfort when He began the Sermon that His message is for those who worry about their uncleanness and spiritual inadequacy before God.

Sow... reap... gather into barns are words repeatedly used by the Lord Jesus, especially in Matthew, for the work of the Gospel. The seed of the word is *sown* (Matthew records three sowing parables- Mt. 13:3,24,31 cp. Mt. 25:26); then *reaped* at Christ's return (Mt. 25:26- as in 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7-9; Rev. 14:15), and finally *gathered* (by the preachers and Angels, Mt. 3:12; 12:30; 13:30,47; 22:10; 25:26,32), "into my barn" (Mt. 3:12; 13:30)- the Kingdom. We cannot simply ignore all this use of identical language in Matthew's Gospel. I noted at Mt. 6:25 and elsewhere that the Lord is often saying 'Do not worry about the activities which are

part of this life, but focus instead on doing those activities in a spiritual sense'. I gave the example of how the command not to worry about what we shall physically eat and drink implies that we should instead be concerned about our spiritual eating and drinking. Remembering the focus of the Sermon upon the need for outgoing, proactive sharing of the Gospel, it would be fair to conclude that the Lord wishes us to not worry about sowing, reaping and gathering into barns in the literal sense, but instead to concern ourselves with doing those things *in the work of the Gospel*. 'Focus on sharing the Gospel, and all the material things will fall into place if you just trust that they will work out OK'.

God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow so much as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. The idea of every little thing in life and the world being controlled by Angels contradicts the notion that God has set this world in motion according to certain natural laws, and that things continue without His direct intervention- as if the whole system is run by clockwork which God initially wound up. Intervention in this system by God has been called 'the hand of providence'. However, these ideas surely contradict the clear Biblical teaching that every movement in the natural creation is consciously controlled by God through His Angels, thus needing an energetic input from Him through His Spirit for every action to occur. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them" suggests that God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. See too Mt. 5:45; 6:30; 10:29-31; Job 38:12,32; 39:27; Amos 9:6; Is. 40:7; Ps. 90:3; 104: 13; Prov. 11:1.

Things being "better than" or "of more value than" is quite a theme in the thinking of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word is used by Him at least three times in this way. Better than the birds, than many sparrows (Mt. 10:31), than a sheep (Mt. 12:12). Doubtless this thought was developed in the Lord by His observation of birds, flocks of sparrows and sheep- developing the implications of the simple thought that we are of more value than them to God. For we are made in His image in a way in which they are not.

12:25 *And which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to the measure of his life?*- As always, the emphasis is upon the state of the heart. No amount of mental worry can add anything to us. And so our hearts and minds should instead be devoted to the God who can transform our body into an eternal state of existence. The same word for "add" occurs in Mt. 6:33. We cannot ultimately 'add' anything to ourselves in secular life; if we seek first the things of God's Kingdom [i.e. 'take thought' for them

rather than our material life], then what is necessary for the material, human life will be added to us. The concept of 'addition' suggests we are to see ourselves as ourselves *without* the issues of food, clothing and survival. We are then to decide how we are to take care of those 'additional' issues. And the Lord is teaching that we are to focus upon spiritual things and the service of God's Kingdom, believing that He will 'add' these things to us. To perceive ourselves independent from our human, secular needs and position is hard. But Paul got the idea right when he spoke of how we bring nothing into this world and can take nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). 'We' come into this world; we exist, but have nothing added to us initially. And 'we' exit this world, likewise without anything 'added'.

No amount of secular thought can add age to our lives. Because life, the eternal life, comes only from God. So it is to Him that our hearts belong. Again, the Lord Jesus was the word of the Sermon made flesh in His own example. For we read that He grew in stature before God (Lk. 2:52 s.w.)- not by anxious worldly thought. Perhaps Zacchaeus thought upon the implications of the Lord's words, because Luke uses the same word to note that he was of inadequate stature (Lk. 19:3). The 'stature' that we seek to attain is not any physique or longevity in this life- but the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13 s.w.). The amount of thought and effort that goes into trying to live longer, adding a cubit to our lifespan, is immense. And understandably so, for those who have only this life. Surely the Lord is saying that we should give no anxious thought to this, but rather, give our mental energy to growing into the age / stature of Himself.

12:26 *If then you are not able to do even that which is least, why are you anxious concerning the rest?*- The least is to add age to our lives, even just a little bit. The Lord is arguing from the viewpoint that "life" is the most important thing we have. To add a fraction to its length is "the least"; and therefore concerns about what we do with that life is "the rest" which should not be worried about exactly because we cannot add length to our lives. This is an unusual but powerful argument against anxious worry. We cannot extend our lives; and therefore, given our inability, we shouldn't worry about "the rest" because we simply have no power to change it anyway. All we can do is to surrender our lives and existence into the hands of a loving Father and His Son.

12:27 *Consider the lilies*- Gk. 'to study deeply', used only here in the NT. Whilst no doubt the Lord with a wave of the hand did draw attention to the mountain lilies growing where He was teaching, He was most definitely not inviting us to take a cursory glance at them. But rather to study them; and the unusual Greek word used for "consider" drove home that point. Perhaps He picked one and invited the disciples to gaze at it in silence for some time.

*How they grow-* The Greek can mean 'in what way' and also 'how much', 'to what great extent'.

*They do not toil, nor do they spin-* As so often in the Lord's teaching and parables, He was careful to balance what He said with relevance to both men ['toiling' in Greek has the idea of heavy labour], and women [spinning]. The appeal for those who are 'toiling' in heavy labour to come to Christ (Mt. 11:28) is an invitation to know in this life a lifting of the curse of labour which came upon Adam. This is not to say that we shall not have to labour, but the desperate toiling for survival is mitigated by the knowledge that God will ultimately provide for His people.

*Yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these-*

It is hard to avoid the connection with the description of the righteous as being clothed in glory at the last day. The clothing metaphor is repeated throughout the NT in this connection (e.g. Rev. 3:5,18; 7:9,13; 19:8). Of course we are dealing with metaphor here- plants are not literally clothed, although perhaps the Lord was alluding to them flowering as their 'glory'. The lily is glorious for what it is, not because it has laboured to make itself something other than it is. We will be made glorious by God in Christ. The city set on a hill cannot be hid. We are who and as we are before God. There is nothing to cover with clothing. This consideration alone puts the whole issue of present clothing into perspective.

The Lord Jesus hinted indirectly at Solomon's pride when he said that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one wild flower, symbolic of how God would clothe, with imputed righteousness, even the weakest believer. This reference to Solomon is only one of several hints that our Lord read Solomon in a negative light. In this context He warns against excessive attention to food, drink and clothes- all things which the court of Solomon revelled in to a quite extraordinary extent. "Take therefore no (anxious) thought for the morrow... sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Mt. 6:34) sounds like a rebuke of the way Solomon did just this in Ecclesiastes, as he intellectually battled with the sadness of knowing that all his achievements would mean nothing in the future. "But", says Jesus, "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33)- clearly a reference to Solomon seeking Divine wisdom and subsequently being blessed; surely the Lord is telling us to follow Solomon's example in this, but to avoid his pride and materialism. Solomon didn't seek the future Kingdom of God, but rather his own. The Lord taught that we should love our enemies, and not fall into the trap of only loving those who love us (Mt. 5:44-46). He seems to be alluding here to Solomon's claim that wisdom says: "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8:17). Maybe I'm wrong, and the Lord didn't have His mind there on that passage; but in the context of Him re-interpreting and re-presenting Solomon to us, it seems likely that He was

consciously showing that God's grace is in fact the very opposite of what Solomon thought. God loves His enemies, and doesn't only love those who love Him; and this is to be our credo likewise. The record of how Solomon spoke of his building of the temple can now be seen as blatant pride in his external appearance of spirituality; without the foregoing analysis of the *hints* of Solomon's pride, this wouldn't necessarily be a correct conclusion to reach; but with all these inspired links, surely we can read the following as pure pride: "Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven (hardly praying in his closet! Was the Lord alluding to Solomon in Mt. 6:6?)... the house that I have built for thy name" (1 Kings 8:22,44). Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men (Acts 17:24?)

12:28 *But if God does so clothe the grass in the field, which today is-* The blessings God gives us do not come by clockwork- we thankfully recognize they are individual acts of mercy towards us. Perhaps our sometimes 'clockwork' prayers are an indication that we think God's blessings of food etc. are clockwork too? In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow merely as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. The worry-free life is a characteristic of the true believer. If God gave us His Son, how much more will He not give us "all things"? "Clothe" translates the Greek *amphi-hennumi-* to enrobe around. The Lord seems to have been referring to a type of wild flower that appears to be draped around by its natural skin, rather like an iris. God gives the wild flowers robes... although they do not spin them or work for them. Solomon's robes weren't as beautiful as them. And how *much more* will God clothe us, both literally and with salvation (for this is how the Bible usually uses the idea of God clothing us). God does so much for the lilies, who are to be 'thrown into the fire'... a phrase which inevitably connects with the Lord's other uses of that idea to describe the final condemnation of the wicked (as in James 1:11). God cares for flowers, and He even cares and provides for those whom He will one day condemn. For God to keep such people alive is a conscious outflowing of His lavish energy, His gracious gift of life and health. If He does that for things and persons which will ultimately be 'thrown into the fire', how *much more* will He clothe us. Let's remember that creation isn't run on clockwork; God makes His rain come, and His sun to rise, on the just and unjust; He's aware when a bird falls from the air; counts the hairs on our heads, as a mother dotes over a new-born baby's features. Just by keeping alive humanity (indeed, all of creation), God is lavishing His grace and consciously outgiving of Himself.

*And tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more shall he clothe you-* The idea of 'casting' is used by the Lord with reference to

condemnation at the last day; and 'the oven' is reminiscent of the imagery of Gehenna fire to destroy the rejected. If God shows so much care and gives so much passing glory to that which shall be rejected and be ultimately unused by Him in eternity- how much more will he clothe us whom He loves and has accepted with His nature. All worry about what garment we shall physically put on, let alone whether it has a brand name on it or not, becomes subsumed beneath the wonder of the metaphor of our final clothing.

*O you of little faith?*- The Lord tells the disciples that they are "of little faith" if they don't perceive and live by what He is teaching about God's care for the flowers. The 'faith' is surely faith in the simple fact that God lavishes His loving care upon us, just because, like a flower, we are here as His creation, in His eternal purpose. All flesh is as grass, and yet the Lord speaks as if God treats us as better than the grass "which is today in the field and tomorrow is cast into the oven" (Lk. 12:28).

The "little faith" is not so much in God's promised provision of physical clothing, but in the promise of final clothing in salvation. But God's care even for those whom He shall condemn, keeping them in life, and the glory He gives to the plant and animal creation which last but for days, is sure encouragement that He shall so much more super abundantly clothe us with salvation- and also, will ensure we don't go physically naked in this world. The Gospel records, as transcripts of the disciples' early preaching, show the disciples appealing to others to have faith, to believe and be baptized. And yet the same accounts record so often how weak and small was the disciples' faith. Matthew is a classic example: Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20. It was on the basis of this acknowledged weakness of their own, that the disciples could appeal so powerfully to others. The more real they showed themselves to be, the more credible was their appeal.

12:29 *And do not seek what you shall eat and what you shall drink, neither be of doubtful mind*- Clothes have been mentioned in :28. These are the three things God provided for Israel in their wilderness journey. The same old clothes, food (manna) and water, of course. But He provided for them. God will provide, but the question is, how does He provide? The same word is used in Mt. 25:36,38,43 about the believer in Christ who is not clothed, and needs to be clothed by other believers- some of whom refuse to, whilst others do. If God really does provide food and clothing for His people- why are some apparently without them? One window onto that question might be that potentially all such needs have been met, in that the food and clothing is within the brotherhood. But there can be a dysfunction, in that it is not shared out as it should be- meaning that some go without the provision which God has potentially provided. But another window is that David could say that he had never seen the seed of the righteous begging bread at any time in his long and

varied life (Ps. 37:25). And despite a lifetime in the poorer world I also have yet to encounter this. The promise holds true, in my observation.

We are to firmly believe in His provision, without being in any sense "doubtful" about it. This lack of doubt will remove all materialism and concern about providing for our futures.

12:30 *For all these things the nations of the world seek after, but your Father knows you have need of these things-* God's people who worry and spend their thoughts on eating, drinking and clothing are no better than the Gentile world. This was a radical thing to say to first century Jews. It is a common Biblical theme that the unspiritual amongst God's people shall share the judgments of the world whom in spirit they are like. The idea of the Gentiles seeking is of course from Is. 11:10, where we read that finally the Gentiles will seek unto Christ (as in Acts 15:17). Perhaps the idea is that we should right now have that changed direction of 'seeking' which the Gentile world will have in the future. Our practical life in Christ is really all about our response to the abounding nature of God's grace. If we really believe it, then we will trust in Him and not worry. The difference between the Gentile world and the believer in Christ is quite simply that we believe that our Father has this level of care and concern for us; and therefore we will not worry, whereas the unbelieving world worry constantly about material things. This is how much of a 'first principle' this really is.

God knows our human situation. Our faithlessness and lack of spiritual mindedness is because of an unspoken sense that actually He is unaware of our needs and the nature of being human. But the God who knows all things is not unaware of humanity and the needs which accompany being human. Frequently the prophecies directed to the Jews returning from Babylon spoke at length of God's amazing knowledge- because the sense was that whilst God existed, He did not know close-up about the human situation. He does, of course, know perfectly.

12:31 *Seek His kingdom-* Seeking is paralleled with taking thought in :29,30. The overall direction of our lives must be towards the Kingdom of God above all. If that is put "first", then actually there is no room for thought about much else. The idea is not 'Seek the Kingdom first, and other things secondly'. Rather must the 'seeking' of our thinking be towards the Kingdom. 'Seeking' was a common Hebraism for 'worship'. But the Lord has defined 'seeking' as thinking, as the overall direction of our mental state, our heart. It was not merely a question of going through the worship rituals of Judaism in a holy space such as the temple. True worship is redefined as the state of our heart.

The Lord's prayer asked us to pray firstly for the things of His Kingdom; this reflects our priorities. I noted under Mt. 6:10 that the coming of the Kingdom in our lives is through the doing of God's will. The Lord's

message is not simply that we should long for the coming of the Kingdom at His second coming; it is that starting right now, we should seek above all things to extend the principles of the Kingdom (as taught in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) in our lives and in the world around us.

*And these things-* Semitic languages such as Aramaic and Hebrew can often have various levels of meaning in a phrase. The phrase may mean or say one thing, but also suggest something else. We are of course reading the expression of those phrases in Greek. *Pas tauta* (usually translated "all these things") need not necessarily be translated as a plural. The idea could equally be 'The whole, complete thing'- we might say 'The real deal'. And that would make sense of the connection between 'added' and Mt. 6:27, which speaks of how we cannot 'add' a cubit to our lifespan. The implication could be that 'the real deal', the *real* thing- eternal life, salvation in God's Kingdom- shall be added if we seek that Kingdom first and foremost. Alternatively, we can interpret more in line with the common translations and understand that 'all these things' is the same 'all these things' of the preceding verses- the material things which God knows we need. These things *will be added* to us if we do not seek them first, but rather seek God's Kingdom first. But there is the suggestion that the real 'all things' for us is eternity in God's Kingdom. For a discussion of what may have happened if these basic things are apparently *not* added to a believer, see on Mt. 6:31.

*Shall be added to you-* The same word is used just a few verses earlier, where the Lord has pointed out that we are unable to 'add' a cubit to our length of human life nor to our body height.

12:32 *Fear not little flock. For it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom-* See on 2 Cor. 8:9. The pleasure or will of our loving Father is that we should share His Kingdom, and that pleasure / will prospered through the cross of Jesus (Is. 53:10). God isn't indifferent. He wants us to be there. That's why He gave His Son to die. It's as simple as that. The deepest longings we feel in our earthly lives, as parents, as lovers, are mere flickers of the hungering desire God feels for us. It is a desire that cost Him His very own crucified son. The Lord Himself knew our basic tendency to disbelieve the certainty of our salvation when He comforted us here not to fear- and the implication is not to fear condemnation, not to fear exclusion from the Kingdom.

He spoke of us all as a little flock, fearing it is *not* the Father's pleasure / will to give us the Kingdom. In doing so, He was as ever drawing on the language of the OT. Joshua-Jesus encouraged Israel that Yahweh delighted / willed that they should enter the land (Num. 14:8); but instead, they were too caught up with doubts... doubt about salvation, about what they could eat and drink day by day, and the giants in the land. This is the very context in which the Lord was speaking- fearing "the nations of the world", doubting where food and clothes would come from,

just as Israel did (Lk. 12:22-29). Yet the pleasure / will of Yahweh is that we should share His Kingdom, and that pleasure / will prospered through the cross (Is. 53:10). Therefore we should not fear or worry about our lack of material things, because God is eager to give us His Kingdom. The certainty of salvation which we may have ought to mean that worry about all human things of this life becomes irrelevant.

12:33 *Sell that which you have and give alms. Make for yourselves purses which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail-* The disciples were told to sell what they had (Lk. 12:22,32,33); but it seems they kept their fishing business. After having asked them this, the Lord again had to speak to them about forsaking all that they had (Lk. 14:33). Their claim to have left literally all and followed Him (Lk. 18:28) appears somewhat exaggerated. To follow Him meant taking up a cross (Lk. 14:27).

He warns the crowd not to everlastingly worry about where the next meal was coming from; and then in that very context, tells *them* to sell what they have (Lk. 12:29-33). He wasn't just talking to the rich. He was telling the desperately poor to forsake what little they had, so as to seek His Kingdom. He probably didn't mean them to take His words dead literally (cp. cutting off the offending hand or foot); what He surely meant was: 'Resign, in your mind, the possession of everything you have, concern yourselves rather with the needs of others and entering my Kingdom'. No wonder those crowds turned round and soon bayed for His blood. See on Mt. 6:19.

The idea is of incremental growth. It's as if spirituality, both in personality and deed, is carefully noted in Heaven as it occurs.

*Where no thief draws near nor moth destroys-* Or, "corrupt". James 5:2 alludes here and states that wealth is already rusted and moth-eaten. So this perhaps was the Lord's idea here, although the grammar is unclear. The idea of gold is that it doesn't rust. What appears to be permanent material wealth is not, and is already rusted in God's eyes.

The Lord's return is going to break up the house of those not looking for His return (Mt. 24:43 s.w.). It may be that 'thieves' is an intensive plural referring to the great thief, whom Jesus likens to Himself in Mt. 24:43. In this case He would be saying that He will take human wealth anyway at the last day- so we should give it to Him now and not seek it. Because we know people (and brethren) who are richer and more wealth-seeking than we are, it's fatally easy to conclude that therefore we aren't rich, therefore we aren't materialistic. This is part of the subtle snare of materialism; that we all think that this is an area where we're not doing too badly; that really, we don't care *that* much where we live, or what the furniture's like, or whether we have money to take a holiday... But remember, our attitude to materialism is the litmus test of all our

spirituality. None of us should be so quick to say that we're OK in this area. These words were spoken to a huge crowd of Jewish peasants. The Lord wasn't only referring to the few rich men who might be hanging around on the edge of the group. He was talking to all of them. He knew their mud walled homes which thieves could so easily dig through. That little cheap bangle, that ring, thinly buried under the bed mat after the pattern of Achan, that prized tunic... the petty riches of the poor which they so strove for, which *to them* were priceless treasures. This is what the Lord was getting at; and His point was that *every one of us*, from beggar to prince, has this 'laying up' mentality. He is almost ruthless in His demands.

12:34 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also-* Gk. 'to there'. The direction of our heart is towards where our treasure is. If our treasure is in Heaven, with God, then our life direction will be towards Him and not towards earthly things. The emphasis of the Lord throughout the Sermon has been on the state of the heart. The overall direction of our heart, our thinking, is all important. That direction cannot be both to earthly things and Heavenly things. Laying up treasure on earth cannot be done whilst having treasure in Heaven. The emphasis of course is on 'laying up', wilfully incrementing, not the mere possession of wealth which the Lord may send into our hands. 'Laying up' means to increment, not to merely possess. But it is the overall direction of our hearts which will be the deciding factor in our eternal destiny; 'to where' they are directed. And we can direct them by deciding what our treasure really is, and where it is.

12:35 *Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning-* Luke 12:35-39 speaks of the Master coming at night and then sharing the Passover meal with those who are "watching". Israel were told to 'watch' throughout that first Passover night (Ex. 12:42 RV mg.), eating the meal with loins girded. Our Lord matches this with "let your loins be girded, and your lamps burning", referring to the virgins parable. Israel eating that meal together, huddled around the slain lamb, the oil burning lamps revealing their tense faces, is therefore a picture of what the new Israel should be like just prior to their deliverance.

12:36 *And be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks-* See on Lk. 17:31. How we respond to the Lord now is how we will respond at His return. Those who open to Him immediately will be saved. The wise virgins go immediately and are thereby accepted, whereas the foolish delay their response. The implication is surely that those who are ready to drop all and go when He knocks, will be saved. Our reaction in that split second of knowing 'He's back!' will determine our eternal destiny; it will effectively be our self-

judgment. And yet in this life too, the figure of the Lord knocking at our door is used to describe our response to Jesus in this life (Rev. 3:20). If there is no immediacy of response now, there will not be then.

The faithful watching for the Lord's return are here described as men waiting for their master to *return* from a wedding. But Christ's coming is also described as His coming *to* the wedding to marry the faithful. This difference may simply indicate that metaphor cannot be pressed too strictly or literally in the process of Biblical interpretation.

*12:37 Blessed are those servants, whom the master when he comes shall find awake-* Passover night was to be "a night of watching" (Ex. 12:42 RV mg.), strongly suggesting "watching in prayer" (Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7; 2 Cor. 11:27). Similarly those who are found "watching" at the Lord's midnight coming (cp. that of the Passover angel) will be found acceptable. The picture of Israel in their family units huddled together around the Lamb, desperately focusing their attention on that saving blood, watching and praying, examining themselves- this is us, right now. For there can be no serious doubt that the second coming is almost upon our generation.

Our attitude to the second coming decides whether we will be in the Kingdom. In this sense we are judging ourselves, right now; we are formulating the outcome of the judgment seat by our attitude now towards the second coming. The proof for this lies in a group of passages which suggest that everyone who truly loves the return of his Lord will be in the Kingdom. Of course, a true love of His coming is only possible if we hold correct doctrine, and if our faith and behaviour is mature enough to be able to look with quiet joy and confidence towards that day. Thus our Lord said that all those whom He finds *watching* will be welcomed into the marriage feast. And 2 Tim. 4:8 is plain enough: "All them also that love his appearing" will be rewarded along with Paul. Paul's own confidence in salvation was because he knew the earnestness of his desire to be "present with the Lord" Jesus (2 Cor. 5:8), such was the closeness of his relationship with Him. Is this really our attitude too? Can we feel like Simeon, that we are quite happy to die after we have just seen our Lord with our own eyes (Lk. 2:29)? Is there really much *love* between us and our Lord?

The foolish virgins knock on the door, i.e. ask for acceptance. At the second coming, the Lord knocked on their door, and they didn't answer immediately. They had decided their own fate by their dilatory response.

*Truly I say to you, that he shall dress himself for service and make them sit down to eat, and shall come and serve them-* The Lord's self-crucifixion spirit was seen not only in His life and then finally in His death and subsequent life; but who He was in His mortal life, He will *eternally* be. He is the same yesterday as today and as for ever. He will dress

Himself to serve us, as a servant, in His future Kingdom, reminiscent of how at the last supper and on the cross He in principle did the same (Phil. 2:7). Thus the spirit of the cross must be a way of life, and this feature of our characters will be seen in the Kingdom too.

The Lord's exalted view of the disciples is reflected in how He washed their feet. To wash the feet of guests was more menial than we might imagine. It was normal to provide water for the guest to wash his own feet. The Midrash *Mekhilta* on Ex. 21:2 taught that a Jewish slave should never be required to wash his Master's feet. But as a sign of extreme devotion and respect, some disciples of the most respected rabbis would wash their feet. Yet the Lord Jesus, having reminded them that He was indeed their Lord and Master, does this to them. And according to Lk. 12:37, He will do this again to us in His Kingdom, in that He will then tie a cloth around Him and come forth and serve us. It would seem the Lord was referring back to this prophecy when He tied a cloth around Him and washed the disciples' feet. This was how highly He thought of them; and that incident was an enacted prophecy of the attitude He will have to us, whom the 12 symbolize, even in the glory of His Kingdom. He surely totally redefined the nature of Lordship and respect.

The Master is so delighted that his servants are watching for Him that He immediately sits down and gets a meal ready for them, doing the serving Himself. There is an arresting element of unreality here. Would a Master really do this, at such an unlikely time at night, would he really serve himself, and would he really be so glad that the servants were waiting up for him? But these elements of unreality serve to teach the lessons: that the Lord will have unspeakable joy at His return because of our expectancy of the second coming, and He will surprise us by His glee and enthusiasm for us. See on 2 Tim. 4:8.

The master makes the servants "recline at table"; they are made to feel like the Master, by the Master Himself! This is what it means to be "in Christ". There's a kind of out of scale inappropriacy about the idea that if the Master comes and finds the servants awake, then He will gird Himself and serve them. Of course they ought to be awake! But it's as if He is so especially impressed by this fact. And we who live awaiting His return need to take note. And the idea of the master serving is of course the idea behind the description of the cross in Phil. 2:6,7. We should have the same awkward sense of wonder at the cross as we have when we recline at the breaking of bread. This implies that those who serve the emblems are in fact manifesting the Lord Jesus, and are actually of far greater significance than the president or the speaker. See on Lk. 13:7.

Ps. 36:8 says that God will "make us" partake of the blessings of the

Kingdom of God. It reminds us of how the Lord Jesus said that in his Kingdom, he will "make us" sit down at a table, and he will come and serve us, knowing full well that he who sits at meat is greater than he who serves (Lk. 22:27). It isn't so difficult to imagine this scene: the Lord of glory wanting us to sit down to a meal, and then *He* comes and serves us. He *will* have to "make us" sit down and let ourselves be served. Perhaps "*Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom*" (Mt. 25:34) likewise suggests a hesitancy of the faithful to enter the Kingdom. And perhaps the way the Lord had to 'make' the healed blind man look up and use his new sight was some kind of foretaste of this. There is even the suggestion in Rev. 7:15 that after the judgment process, the Lord will come down off His throne and mix with us, after the pattern of Joseph. See on Lk. 18:17.

The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. It is wrong to think that the Lord was only humble in His ministry, but will return with almost bitter indignation. This is not so. He girded Himself and served His men in the days of His flesh (Jn. 13:4); and He will do *exactly* the same again, in the glory of His Kingdom (Lk. 12:37). That same essential humility of God and Jesus will be with Him; He won't have changed. It is His fundamental, eternal characteristic. The fear of God lest Israel would not attain the promised land ("lest peradventure...", Ex. 13:17) shows His humility, in being so concerned for the salvation of petty man; and that characteristic likewise will be His, right up to and through and beyond the day of judgment.

The Lord who will judge us knows us each individually. The question arises, 'Why would *all* the servants stay awake in order to open the door (Lk. 12:37)? Why not just the night watchman? The answer is that there is a totally unique and special personal relationship between this Master and *all* His servants.

*12:38 And if he shall come in the second watch and if in the third and find them waiting, so blessed are they-* We must speak the word as others are able to hear it, expressing the Truths of Christ in language and terms which will reach them. There are some differences within the Gospels in the records of the parables. It could be that the different writers, under inspiration, were rendering the Lord's Aramaic words into Greek in different styles of translation. Also, we must bear in mind the different audiences. Mark speaks of the four watches of the night which would have been familiar to Romans (Mk. 13:35 cp. 6:48), whereas Lk. 12:38 speaks of the Jewish division of the night into three watches (cp. Jud. 7:19). Yet Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience.

12:39 *But know this-* Our focus should be on 'knowing' that we don't 'know' the time of His coming; and therefore watching at all times, living *as if* His return is imminent. This would be one explanation of why Paul and Peter write in their letters as if the Lord's return is imminent when in fact He did not return in the first century.

*That if the master of the house had known in what hour the thief was coming-* The Lord is drawing a parallel between the householder watching, and the disciples / believers watching, being aware of the possibility of the Lord's return at any moment. He will only come unexpectedly, as a thief, to those who are not watching and are caught unprepared. But almost every usage of *oikodespotes* in the parables is concerning the Lord Jesus (Mt. 10:25; 13:27; 20:1,11; 21:33; Lk. 13:25). As so often, the Lord was speaking to the disciples but not forgetting to speak also to Himself. He was soon to ask them in Gethsemane to watch and pray *with Him* (Mt. 26:38); as if His watchfulness was to be theirs. In Mt. 13:52 He does also use this term about every scribe instructed in the things of the Kingdom. We are all the master of the house in the sense that we are to all be watching out for the household as a whole; the work of the Lord Jesus is to be our work. 'Watching' is thereby defined as not only watching ourselves, but watching out for the rest of the household. This is being presented here as the supreme way of not becoming unwatchful. By watching out for others we are watching for the Lord's return, living with the imminence of His coming over before us.

*He would have stayed awake-* The point is surely that if we were to know when the Lord is coming, then we would watch for Him *at the time of His coming*; just as a householder would watch out for a thief if he knew ahead of time when the thief was coming. Because we do not know when the Lord is coming, we must watch for His coming all the time, living *as if* He is coming imminently even though we do not *know* for sure whether He is or not. Therefore our living as if He is about to come is to be done independently of any hunches we may have that He is about to return, based as they usually are upon prophetic interpretations.

*And not have left his house to be broken into-* This is the key; recognizing that the household of God is in fact our household, and we are to watch out for it as we would for our very own family. Indeed, it is our family. The connection is to Mt. 23:38 "*Your house is left unto you desolate*". Here, "*his house*" is "broken up". The Lord is saying that they were in the status of condemnation already. The physical breaking up of the temple would be the result of the elders of Israel not 'watching' as intended.

12:40 *You also- be ready-* The Lord was initially speaking to the disciples, the future elders of the church. The elders, represented by "the goodman of the house", have a special responsibility in this watching, so that the Lord's return is not thief-like to the 'house' of their ecclesia (Mt.

24:43). They "watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17). But in a sense, the duty of watching falls to each of us: we're all elders (Lk. 12:41-46). All believers are called to watch, and that watching involves watching for others. The connection with 1 Thess. 5:2,6 therefore suggests that one of the reasons for the unworthy experiencing the second coming "as a thief" will be the lack of awareness by their elders concerning the spiritual trials of the last days. The reverse is also true. A good latter-day elder will have to give his very soul to the work of watching over the flock, fully aware of the many dangers they face in the last days. It is difficult to see how this vital role can be filled by those who have sold their souls to demanding employers. This work can't be simply left to others. This passage teaches that the servant who must feed the household with appropriate food represents each of us; he must watch for the Lord's return and be diligent in feeding the household; yet (it must be stressed), this parable is intended for each of us (cp. Mk. 13:37). If he doesn't do this, he is rejected. We are set a high standard here. Christ is "the goodman of the house" (Mt. 20:11), but here "the goodman of the house" represents each of us (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,40). We are in Him, and therefore we must try to share his level of concern for his household. He carried his cross for us, for our salvation. And he asks us to share His cross, i.e. His devotion to the body of believers, even unto death. If we are in Him, we too must devote ourselves to the saving of the body.

The very same word and idea for "ready" is repeated in Mt. 25:10. Those who were "ready" and responded immediately to the news of the Lord's return were accepted. The 'readiness' is in being constantly ready to leave all and go to be with the Lord. We shouldn't be so surprised, therefore, that life in this world is so unbearable for the believers; for we are being led to a point where we will be ready and eager to leave all for the sake of being with the Lord.

*For in the hour you do not expect- the Son of Man comes-* The fact we do not know the date of the Lord's return is what makes us live in a spirit of constant readiness for His coming. The point is that we should be "ready" even when we "think not" that the Lord's coming is near. The contrast is being drawn between on one hand our 'readiness', and on the other, our 'thinking', our computing, our calculations, the seeming to us, that the return of Christ is near. "The Son of Man comes" uses the present tense, whereas "Be... ready" would properly require the future tense. There may be here a hint that the future coming of the Son of Man in essence is ongoing in the life of the believer.

12:41 *And Peter said: Lord, are you telling this parable aimed at us, or to everyone?-* See on Mk. 13:34; Lk. 13:1. Peter perceived that the parable was aimed at those who had responsibility for the Lord's house / family. He wondered whether it could really be so that he and those immature

disciples were really being spoken to as the elders of the new Israel; and he wondered whether actually the Lord meant that we are all elders. The Lord rarely answers questions directly, but lifts them to a higher level. And He does so here. He urges us each to take responsibility, and to grasp the urgency of living as if He will return any moment- knowing that this will mean giving an account for our responsibilities toward others.

12:42 *And the Lord said: Who then is the faithful and wise steward-* See on :41 and 1 Tim. 3:15. One aspect of spirituality leads to another. Thus the Lord commends the one who is watching for His coming, and then speaks of how those who are to be accepted at His coming are those busy preparing spiritual food for their brethren (Lk. 12:39,42). The implication is that he who is watching, truly watching, for the return will be busy about the brotherhood's needs; and in caring for them is our own personal preparedness. "Let patience have her perfect work... let brotherly love continue" sounds as if we must allow the process of righteousness inspired by spiritual acts of love and patience. We can obstruct that process (James 1:4; Heb. 13:1).

The Lord is replying to Peter's question as to whether we the hearers and readers are to assume that it is our responsibility to feed others in the household. The answer seems to be that yes it is, because this is what is naturally elicited by watching and being alert for the Lord's return.

Our 'watching' is to be expressed in terms of ensuring that all the household have their food at the appropriate time. In Mk. 13:34,35 the Lord expands on this parable in saying that each of the servants are given a different work, but He wants us to be like the doorkeeper [AV "porter"], whose job it was to simply watch- and "You, watch, therefore!". Putting together the various images, we see that we are likened to the very master of the house; then to the chief steward who was to provide food for the household; and then to the lowest doorkeeper. We are thoroughly representative of the Lord Himself, the steward of the household, and the lowest servant, the doorkeeper. But throughout the analogies, we are to above all mirror the way in which they watched / looked out for the wellbeing of the household. Being occupied with this is what makes a person ready and watching for their Lord's return.

This is the "good and faithful [s.w.] servant" of Mt. 25:21,23 who is commended for trading his Lord's goods and making increase of them. Here, the duty of the faithful servant is to care for the household. These are different metaphors for the same reality- spiritual care for others is a way of increasing the overall wealth of the Lord and the progress of His household. We have been delegated a huge amount, and the Lord is 'absent', not in the sense that He is not spiritually with us, but in that He will not intervene in how we carry on His work. The salvation and spiritual prosperity of others is therefore in our hands. By laziness and unwise

behaviour we can seriously damage them and limit the progress of the Lord's business; and He being 'absent' will not forcibly intervene to stop us, in this life. The "wise servant" is likewise to be connected with the "wise [s.w.] virgins" (Mt. 25:2,4,8,9). The connection is, however, slightly odd. The wise servant is to provide food for the others in the household. The wise virgins were unable to provide oil for the weaker members of the household, because they were themselves weak and had fallen asleep when clearly they were intended to remain awake. If the connection with the next parable is indeed purposeful, then we are left with the picture of the wise virgins being wise only in that they *intended* to provide for others, although in reality they were too weak themselves to follow through with that intention in practice. But their intention to do so was counted to them as wisdom.

*Whom his master shall set over his household to give them their portion of food in due season?*- The idea is surely that if we are doing that now, we shall do it eternally. If we are found 'doing' care and provision for the household, then we shall be empowered to eternally do this in essence. The important thing is that when the Lord comes, He finds us engaged [at least mentally] with what we shall eternally be doing, living the essence of the Kingdom life now. We have been made ruler over the household now; we shall be set over it eternally if when the Lord comes He finds us doing what He has appointed us to do. When the Lord comes, He finds the servant either smiting the servants (Mt. 24:49), or feeding and caring for them (Mt. 24:45). Our attitude to our brethren in the moment of our Lord's coming will decide our eternal future. The structure of the parable allows of no half way position. The purpose of any authority given to any of us within the household is in order to feed others. If that, in the end, is not being done, then we are abusing the trust and authority given us by the Lord. The "food" is called their *sitometron* in Lk. 12:42, their "portion of food", or ration. The impression is given of a steward providing the right food ['nourishment'] for the right persons at the right time. This is the essence of all care for others. *Kairos*, "due season", means literally 'time', and is often used about 'the time' of the Lord's return (Mt. 8:29; 13:30; 16:3; 21:34). Indeed it is used in the Olivet prophecy for this moment: "You know not when the time is" (Mk. 13:33). The idea seems to be that instead of worrying about calculating "the time" of the Lord's coming, we are instead to be concerned with feeding others in the household at that *kairos* or time. This is the sign of our preparedness and watchfulness, and not our [apparent] skill in matching world events to Bible prophecies.

12:43 *Blessed is that servant, whom his master, when he comes, shall find so doing*- 'Watching' is a major theme here in the context; but the blessing in view here is for "doing", actually providing nourishment for the household. Again we see the parallel between watching and doing.

Watching can never be an academic interest in Bible prophecies. It has to be active, or else it isn't 'watching' in the sense intended.

In "Shall find" we find emphasized the eternal importance of our attitude of mind at the moment of the Lord's coming. Those who want to go to the Lord are confirmed in their desire by being snatched away to meet Him, whereas those who don't have that immediacy of desire will be left behind, to be forcibly gathered to Him later.

12:44 *Of a truth I say to you, that he will set him over all that he has-* We each individually have this promise of being made ruler over *all* that Jesus has. The "all things" refers to the believers; a concordance study of these two words gives fair testimony to this. The ecclesia *is* the body of Christ, "the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23). Let us pause to exult in this fact; that Jesus *exists* for no one else except the believers. Each of us is promised by Him that He will make us ruler over "all that he hath", i.e. all the saints. We will each rule over each other because we will each be so closely identified with the Lord Jesus; yet in another sense there will be a hierarchy of spiritual glory in the Kingdom.

If we are doing what we have been empowered to do for the household now, then we shall be appointed to eternally do this. The state of perfection in the Kingdom is described as us (the complete church of all ages) having reached, "a perfect man... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", having grown up into Christ, who is the head of the body (Eph. 4:13,15). When the Lord comes, we will each individually be made ruler over *all* that He has, we will each individually be fully righteous, fully manifesting the Lord Jesus. There seems to be marked connection with the fact (brought out in the parable of the talents) that we will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47; 25:15). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.).

In this life, the servant was 'made ruler over' [s.w.] the household, his job was to feed his fellow servants. If he is found so doing at the Lord's return, he will be made ruler over literally all that his master owns, "all his goods" (AV) is literally 'all that He has'. This is a profound insight into the nature of eternity. All that God has will be put under us. God has not subjected the world to come to the Angels but to us (Heb. 2:5). This is because "all things" are to be put in subjection under the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:8), and all that is true of Him is true of us. But that being part of Him is dependent upon our serving of our brethren within the household. He is the householder, but we also are, because we are in Him.

12:45 *But if that servant-* The parable of Mt. 25:26,30 likewise features two types of servant; the "faithful" servant [s.w.], and the equivalent of

this "servant" is the "wicked and lazy servant... the unprofitable servant" (25:26,30). That servant who did nothing is paralleled with the servant who proactively got drunk, thought his Lord delayed, and beat his brethren. Despite all that bad behaviour, the real issue was that he did nothing positive for his Lord. So often, the fellow servants are effectively beaten because of the sins of omission, inaction, refusal to stand up for the abused.

*Shall say in his heart-* The Bible knows nothing of a personal, cosmic Satan. Rather the real adversary is presented as the human heart, and therefore a huge amount of attention is given to the state of the human heart and the significance of our self-talk. Nobody consciously says 'The Lord is delaying, great, now I can drink and abuse my brethren'. But the Lord puts His finger on the self-talk that goes on in our deep subconscious, and He does so in the context of warning against having a specific date in mind for the second coming.

*My lord delays his coming-* There is no turning to atheism or rebellion against the Lord, but rather the root cause of the misbehaviour is placed by the parable upon the man's mentality that because he knows the date of his Lord's coming, he can just ensure he's behaving properly when He comes. And this is the purpose of the parable- to challenge that idea and explain why the date must be left unknown by us. This is the same idea as the foolish virgins not taking oil with them in the next parable. The idea is simply that the foolish take no oil because they are certain they know the day and hour of the bridegroom's coming; whereas the wise recognize that they do not know the exact day and hour, and therefore act accordingly by taking more oil in case there is a delay. This is exactly the point being made in the Lord's teaching at the end of Matthew 24. Those who are convinced they know the day and hour, for whom the idea of flexibility or delay in the Lord's purpose is anathema, are in fact those who fall asleep and are caught unprepared.

The Lord Jesus / bridegroom "tarries" (Mt. 25:5), the same Greek word translated 'delay' in "my Lord delays His coming". The Lord *does* delay His coming- the man's mistake was in acting inappropriately because of this. God's judgments likewise "waited", or delayed, in Noah's time (1 Pet. 3:20)- presumably for the 120 year period of Gen. 6:3. In a similar way, the judgment on Nineveh preached by Jonah also delayed- it came in the end, but their repentance meant that it delayed at that time. In the first century, all things were ready for the Supper- supper time had come. But the start of the supper has been delayed 2000 years by Israel's rejection of the invitation to participate (Lk. 14:17). The evil servant misbehaved because he thought the Lord had delayed and therefore he could misbehave, so long as he got his act together at the time of the Lord's coming. This parable is therefore an explanation of why we must recognize that we don't know the date of the Lord's return; if we do think

we know it, then this will lead us into misbehaviour. Those with a determinate, black and white view of God and His prophetic style have often shown us the truth of this parable. They thought the Lord would return at a certain date, or once certain conditions had been fulfilled. These things happened, and the Lord didn't come- and their behaviour went seriously downhill.

Moses' sprinkling of Israel with blood and then going away for forty days (the period of probation), returning after a perceived delay to a people lost in revelry with only a faithful minority, must point forward to our Lord's ascension to the Father's presence after the blood sprinkling of the cross, and His subsequent return. The Lord's words here suggest he read this incident along these lines: "That evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delays his coming (cp. "Where is the promise of his coming?" and the people feeling Moses had delayed to return); and shall begin to... eat and drink with the drunken (cp. "the people sat down to eat and drink", 1 Cor. 10:7); the Lord of that servant shall come... in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder"- recalling the Levite's sudden massacre of the people on Moses' return. If the return of Moses from the mount is indeed typical of the second coming, then it would follow that the majority of the new Israel will be unprepared at the Lord's return also.

"The Lord (Jesus) is not slack concerning his promise (to return- of Jn. 14:3,18,28), as some men (in the ecclesia) count slackness", but is longsuffering (2 Pet. 3:9). The Greek for "slack" here means 'delay'; this is assurance that God is not 'delaying' as men dilly-dally in the execution of their plans, but is rather postponing this for a good reason. There's an allusion here to Is. 30:17-19, which records how Israel would suffer for their sins, but then God would wait for a certain time until they cried to Him in repentance, before bringing about a time of blessing on the earth based around the Lord's presence in Jerusalem: "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one (Dt. 28 language)... until you are left as a tree bereft of branches (how Paul describes what happened to Israel in the first century, Rom. 11)... and therefore (i.e. because you are such sinners) will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted (through your repentance), that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: you shall weep no more (the language of Is. 65:17-25, quoted in 2 Pet. 3:13): He will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry (of repentance): *when* He shall hear it, He will answer you". Not only is God delaying the Kingdom until there is repentance in Israel, but such is His *mercy* that He will not bring it about until such repentance. His purpose should not be seen, therefore, just in terms of the cold equation 'Repentance in Israel= second coming', but the supreme *mercy* and *love* which this arrangement shows should be appreciated. "And *therefore* will He be exalted" Isaiah comments- by

those who understand these things. Rom. 11:32-36 is a marvellous example of this.

*And shall begin-* The idea is that only soon after he has begun his misbehaviour, the Lord comes. This highlights the point that because the man was sure that he knew the exact time of the Lord's coming, and that time was not right now, *therefore* he did these bad things. The whole point of the parable is to explain *why* we do not and should not ever think we know the date of His coming. For it is this which is portrayed in the parable as the root reason why he begins beating the fellow servants and being self-indulgent, mixing with the unbelievers rather than the believers.

*To beat the menservants and the maidservants-* Smiting the fellow servants is related to keeping other company- with the drunken. It could be that this parable is intended to have a specific latter day fulfilment, in that it speaks of the last few days or little while before the Lord's return. For the evil servant has only just begun to beat, eat and drink, when his Lord comes. The 'smiting' might suggest that the evil servant joins in the persecution of the Lord's servants which will be ongoing in that final period of tribulation.

The idea of the steward of the house smiting the fellow servant is referred to by Paul (in the Greek text) in 1 Cor. 8:12, concerning *wounding* the conscience of weak brethren. Paul's vision of the latter-day ecclesia was therefore that materialistic elders would act with no thought as to their effect on the consciences of the flock, and thereby many would stumble. The Lord's only other reference to fellow servants is in Mt. 18:28-33, where the deeply indebted servant 'beat' a fellow servant who owed him a relatively small amount. The beating of the fellow servants may therefore be intended to be understood in terms of refusing to forgive, and demanding what is due.

*And to eat and drink and to be drunk-* His duty was to feed his fellow servants, but instead he became obsessed with feeding himself. The Lord spoke of 'eating and drinking' as characterizing Noah's world- and also Lot's world (Lk. 17:28). There's nothing wrong with any of the things Noah's world were doing in themselves, but they were indulged in to the point of obsession. The man called to go in to the ark and care for those within it had instead gone outside into the world and engaged with them in their way of life.

The man himself becomes drunk; he is influenced by the company he now keeps. He is alluded to in 1 Thess. 5:3-7, where the picture is graphically created of a man who has been hard drinking for a whole evening, now at home stupefied, late at night. It is then that the thief comes; whilst dimly aware of his coming, the man is quite unprepared to meet him and keep

his (spiritual) house intact. This will be the tragic position of those who through belief and practice are unready for their Lord. It seems that a materialistic eldership, uncommitted to the real needs of the household, indifferent to guarding the house, will contribute to our latter-day apostasy as a community. And note the correspondence between those who are harsh on their brethren being those who are also caught up in the things of the world. The drunken servant starts to beat the fellow servants, using a Greek word which means to punish. This creates the picture of a worldly ecclesial elder over-disciplining others, whilst himself being guilty of the same things. He is transferring his guilt onto others, and punishing them with the punishment he subconsciously knows he deserves. No wonder there will be so much friction and disunity amongst spiritual Israel of the last days.

12:46 *The master of that servant shall come in a day when he does not expect, and at an hour he does not know*- The implication is that the unfaithful servant should have 'known' and 'been aware of' his Lord's coming. He should have lived every moment as if *this* were the day and hour of the Lord's coming; even whilst recognizing that he does not finally know it. There is another possibility, discussed in a separate digression- and that is simply that the faithful in [literally] the very last few days *will* in fact know that the day and hour. The language of the Olivet prophecy brims with certainty as to the faithful *knowing* the time: "When you shall see these things come to pass, *know* that it is near... you *know* that Summer is near... *when* you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then *know* that the desolation thereof is near... when you therefore shall see (same Greek translated "know") the abomination of desolation... when you see (Gk. know, understand, perceive) all these things come to pass, *know* that the Kingdom of God is near". The idea is that we will understand clearly certain signs, and know *therefore* that the Lord is imminent. This all seems in marked contrast to the Lord's conclusion to the prophecy: "of that day and that hour *knoweth* no man". There is a marked connection here with the fact that he has just been saying that it will be possible to know once the signs are seen and understood. Surely he must be talking specifically to the twelve; *they* didn't *then* know the time, neither could they; but those who saw the signs by implication *would* know. In the context of these words about them not *then* knowing the day and hour, the Lord said that the believer *at the time of his return* who didn't know the day and hour of his coming would be found unprepared (Mt. 24:50). This is surely proof enough that the last generation *will* in some way know the day and hour, i.e. the appointed time (cp. Rev. 9:15), of the Lord's return. This point is a very powerful one.

This word *ginosko* is used of how the world of Noah's day did not "know" until all too late (Mt. 24:39). We are to "know" the time (Mt. 24:33 "know that it is near", "know this" Lk. 21:31). And yet we cannot know the time

in terms of a calendar date. Therefore we are to "know" the time in living according to the principle that the Lord *could* come imminently, at this very moment.

*And shall cut him into pieces-* Gk. 'to cut him in two', literally 'to dichotomize'. This unreal and severe punishment- to cut a slave in half as punishment- emphasizes the extreme nature of the wrongdoing. This may also allude to the idea of cutting a covenant. The parties to the covenant passed between the pieces of the covenant sacrifice and thereby proclaimed that they should be cut in two if they broke the covenant. These condemned persons, in this particular teaching, would therefore refer to those who had already entered covenant with God and are being judged for it. And the hint is that they broke that covenant because they preferred to be hypocrites, to look good in the eyes of men when their heart was somewhere else. The evil servant will be "cut asunder", i.e. his hypocrisy will be openly revealed for the first time (remember, he was an ecclesial elder in mortal life, according to the parable). There will be a public dimension to the judgment process, for the whole purpose of it is for the learning of those present at it, rather than for God's benefit. What we have spoken in the Lord's ear will be revealed by him openly ("from the housetops") at the judgment (Lk. 12:3). When the righteous receive their inheritance (i.e. at the judgment), then the fool will be held up to shame (Prov. 3:35 NIV).

*And put him with the unbelievers-* The Lord will appoint (the wicked servant) his portion with the unbelievers, his portion with the hypocrites (Mt. 24:51), reminiscent of a "goat" in the later parable being told to go to the group of goats at the left-hand side. They represent "the unbelievers", i.e. those responsible but lacking in real faith (the word is used concerning this group in Jn. 20:27; Mt. 17:20; Rom. 11:20; Heb. 3:12; Tit. 1:15; Rev. 21:8). The Lord's self-indulgent servant will be cut asunder at judgment day- revealed for who he really is- and then be appointed his portion with the [other] hypocrites (Mt. 24:41). The rejected servants, who appeared to believe but who only play-acted, are in fact unbelievers. They have as little faith as the unbelieving world, although they think they believe and serve the Lord.

12:47 *And that servant, who knew his master's will and did not prepare or did not do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes-* Beating with stripes was a synagogue punishment. The Lord is developing the idea that He a new Israel is coming into being. "Prepare" is the same word used of John seeking to prepare the way for Messiah's coming in terms of getting people morally prepared (s.w. 1:76; 3:4). Those who had heard John's message, been baptized and potentially prepared for the Lord's coming... would be beaten much if they refused to respond further and instead rejected the Lord, as many of John's apparent converts did. "Prepared" is the same word just used in :20 of the rich fool 'preparing'

for his wealth. The rich fool is therefore the servant who knew his master's will, but prepared for himself rather than for his Lord. Our efforts to 'prepare' for eternity are in step with the Lord's work through the Spirit to 'prepare' our places in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:2,3; Heb. 11:16 s.w.). We pray "Your will be done" (Lk. 11:2 s.w.) as a way of saying that we want the will of God, which is that we shall inherit our prepared place in eternity, to become our will; His preparation works therefore in tandem with our own. It is therefore a desire to 'do' the master's will which is a lead characteristic of those who shall be finally saved (Jn. 7:17).

*12:48 But he that did not know and did things worthy of stripes, he shall be beaten with few stripes-* We have here a clear statement of the principle that knowledge makes us responsible to judgment, being 'asked the more' at that day if we have been 'given much'.

"A fool's mouth is [will be] his destruction, and his mouth calleth for strokes [i.e. condemnation at the judgment, Lk. 12:47,48]" (Prov. 18:6). By our words we may be *shouting out for condemnation*.

We all commit sin worthy of "stripes". The word is only found elsewhere in the gospels in 10:30, of the wounding of the man saved by the Samaritan. And that man is each of us.

*And to whom much is given, of him shall much be required-* The judgment will 'require' of us a life lived in accordance with the knowledge of the Lord's will which we have been given. This is helpful to bear in mind when considering whether those who know less than we do are in fellowship with the Lord. Many of them are- it's just that we have been given more knowledge, and more shall be required of us. The same word is used of how the Father seeks or requires fruit from His trees (13:6); the more effort He has made with them, the more fruit is required. And that seeking of response from us is ongoing now in the Lord's relationship with us; He in this sense searches for us until He finds us (15:6; 19:10; Jn. 4:23 s.w.).

*And to whom people commit much, of him will they ask the more-* Speaking of the principle of responsibility upon which our judgment will be conducted, the Lord hints at Angelic involvement in the judgment: "to whom men (our guardian angels?) have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Lk. 12:48 AV). See on Lk. 6:38. We who are literate, living in an age of mass ease and technology, we who have the benefit of hindsight in looking back upon the development of God's purpose with this earth... have had much committed to us. And much is therefore required.

*12:49 I came to cast fire upon the earth, yet it is already kindled!-* The Lord wished that the fire He came to kindle had already been kindled. This may be an allusion to a common Latin saying at the time: *Nemo accendit nisi ipse ardet*, 'No one can kindle another unless he himself

burns'. In this case Jesus is likening Himself to a fire which ignites others; and yet He so wished that someone else had earlier come and been Messiah. Some of the Messianic passages describe Him being amazed that there had been no man, and He Himself therefore dressed for action and did the Messianic duty. It is an essay in His humility that He should have held such a view. It also reflects how there had been previous opportunities for Messiah to come.

The Gehenna fire of condemnation of the wicked is "already kindled" by men's attitude now. The tree that will not bring forth good fruit "*is* hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mt. 7:19)- alluding to the figure of Gehenna, into which the rejected will be 'thrown'. The ungodly *are* already like the chaff that will be blown away after the Lord's return (Ps. 1:4,5; 35:5; Job 21:18-20 cp. Is. 5:24; 17:13; 29:5; Dan. 2:35; Lk. 3:17). Those who lose their first love are *now* condemned (1 Tim. 3:6; 5:12). The Lord Jesus stands with the sword of judgment *now* going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16), as it will do at the final judgment (Is. 11:4).

The disciples had wanted to bring fire down as Elijah had done, to consume their opponents. The Lord replied that His spirit is different; they didn't know His Spirit, without which, Paul says, "we are none of his". And yet still He patiently bore with them. However, He also says that He has come to send fire on the earth at the last day- an evident reference to Elijah. We could read the Lord's treatment of the disciples' request as saying 'The time to act like Elijah will come- but it's not now'. Likewise His comment that He came to bring division rather than peace. Elijah was renowned as the prophet who would turn the fathers to the children and bring peace in the land (Mal. 4:6; Eccles. 48:10). The Lord may be saying: 'You think, like some of the Jews, that I am a re-incarnation of John the Baptist, the Elijah prophet. I'm not. I'm the Messiah Himself. My spirit is different'. In that very context, the Lord stressed that He had a baptism to undergo, rather than to dispense to others as had John (Lk. 12:50). Perhaps the immaturity of the disciples was so great that they, former disciples of John, somehow believed that Jesus had turned into a re-incarnation of John. In this case, they would have been caught up in the surrounding world's view of Jesus- for there was much speculation that Jesus was John the Baptist *redivivus*. The way John in his gospel labours the point that John the Baptist "was not that light", i.e. Messiah (Jn. 1:8), perhaps is John's recognition that finally, they got it right. You can imagine him preaching in those early days: 'After John's death we thought at times that Jesus was some sort of reincarnation of John. But Peter got it right, and now, I'm just making it clear also what the truth was. He wasn't John the Baptist *redivivus* as so many thought. We were caught up a bit in that thinking; but we were wrong'.

The Lord Jesus spoke of how "I am come to send fire on earth [after the pattern of Elisha against apostate Israel]... I am come to give... division". He parallels the fire of condemnation with division. And yet He says that this figurative fire is "already kindled". If we are divided willingly, of our creation, then we stand self-condemned. This is how serious this matter is. I fear, really fear, that in the day of final account it may be that a brother or sister has lived separately from the world, believed all the right things, and yet his or her divisiveness means that they are condemned together with the immoral and the worldly.

The idea of fire from Heaven in Lk. 12:49-54 is associated by the Lord with division in the brotherhood. And the Lord went on to say that the Pharisees could interpret a cloud arising in the West as a sign that rain was coming, but they could not forgive their brethren, which was what was essential (Lk. 12:54). This just has to be a reference to Elijah, who saw a cloud arising from the West as a sign of rain. The Lord is, it seems, sadly associating Elijah with the Pharisees. And yet... despite all this, the Lord Jesus likens Himself to Elijah. He sent fire on earth as Elijah did (Lk. 12:49). And the context of the Lk. 9:54 reference to Elijah is that the Lord's time had come that he should be received up, and he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51). This is all very much the language of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1). And elsewhere Jesus quotes Elijah's words "Your son lives" (1 Kings 17:23 = Jn. 4:50-53). What this shows is that the Lord saw what was good in Elijah, and He didn't separate Himself from someone who didn't have His Spirit. He simply wanted His followers to learn better from him.

*12:50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and great is my distress until it be accomplished!*- These words almost seem to be the Lord speaking to Himself. The immediate context is of judgment to come, and the divisive effect the Lord's work will have upon relationships. But *His* focus was upon His upcoming death for the salvation of His people. This was what He sought above all to 'accomplish'.

The cross was to the Lord a baptism He was being baptized with, it was not only accomplished in His physical death; the process was ongoing. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). The Lord's fear of death was, it seems to me, to a far greater extent than what even we experience- doubtless because He knew all that was tied up with *His* death and how much depended upon it. Hence His "distress" He spoke of how "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Lk. 12:50). See on Heb. 5:7.

*12:51 Do you think that I came to give peace in the earth? I tell you no,*

*but rather division*- Peace on earth was a feature of the messianic Kingdom. The Lord is emphasizing that His Kingdom had not yet come. Until then, there would be division between the kingdom people and the others. To be unwillingly caught up in a divided house / family is not, therefore, a sin or a sign of our personal condemnation. There must be schisms amongst us, that they might make manifest who the faithful are, by their attitude to them.

The Lord surely has in mind what He had commanded in Mt. 10:13, where He uses the same words to describe how the apostles were to let their *peace come* upon the households they entered- the peace of *shalom* with God, the salvation of Jesus. But that peace could return to them unclaimed, and the Lord's words here seem to imply that He is warning them that generally, their message of peace will not be accepted.

"Peace on the earth" is an allusion to the prophecies of peace in the Messianic Kingdom, and to the Angelic proclamation that there would be peace on earth through Christ (Lk. 2:14). The disciples were prone to be influenced by Jewish expectations and hopes for an imminent Messianic Kingdom to be established. The Lord's point is therefore surely that they were not to preach a gospel of immediate peace on earth, but rather one to come in the future; He made the point later that He had come to *take* peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4), but of course He offered *peace with God* through forgiveness and reconciliation which He would achieve through His life and death (Col. 1:20).

12:52 *For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three*- Salvation, as Robert Roberts so frequently said, is an individual matter. It is not a collective affair. Compare two passages within the Lord's teaching, which each use the same Greek words: "I am come to give... division. From henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three [i.e. sometimes they would be 2:3 and other times 3:2- there would be a series of disagreements over various issues]... a house divided against a house falls" (Lk. 12:52,52 cp. Lk. 11:17). What are we to make of this? Every divided house or Kingdom will "fall", i.e. be condemned at judgment day (s.w. Mt. 7:27; Rom. 14:4; 1 Cor. 10:12; Heb. 4:11; James 5:12). And yet Jesus inevitably divides 'houses'. Surely the Lord is teaching that every Kingdom and family will fall, because it will be divided, and therefore the only hope of salvation is purely individual. This was radical thinking in first century Palestine, where the destiny of the extended family was held to be uniform; i.e., you would end up in the last day wherever your extended family did. But the Lord is cutting through all this, and teaching that salvation is a personal matter. No single extended family will, as a unit, avoid being divided by the result of the judgment. The Lord's teaching surely has some relevance to some Christian cultures

which can likewise give the impression that large, well established Christian families will almost automatically all be saved.

*12:53 They shall be divided, father against son and son against father-* Division within families, especially between sons and fathers, was seen as far more awful than it is today. But the offer of Christ to be Lord, to be our head, is so compelling and colossal in implication that there can simply be no other option than division, at least emotionally and psychologically, between those members of a household who accept Him as Lord and head, and those who will not. The implications of what the Lord is teaching here outlaws any thought of marriage out of the faith; to consciously create a divided family from the start can only reflect a very low level of commitment to Him as Lord, Master and household head.

*Mother against daughter and daughter against her mother. Mother in law against her daughter in law and daughter in law against her mother in law-* Why these specific examples? Perhaps the Lord envisaged the younger generation being more responsive than their elders. But maybe His point was that the younger members of an extended family were expected to obey the head of the household- and the good news of His Kingdom, His dominion over men and women, was that loyalty was no longer to be to the head of the family, but to Him. For He was offering men and women entrance into a new Kingdom, where He was King and His dominion was accepted in the lives of those who accepted the Gospel of that Kingdom.

*12:54 And he said to the crowds: Also, When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, Here comes a shower- and so it comes to pass-* Showers are figures for the Messianic blessings. They were to perceive that His coming was imminent. This is all in the context, before and after, of forgiving our brother and living at peace. A joint focus on living as if the Lord's coming is imminent, reading life's signs to mean that we are living on the brink of His coming... this will enhance our relationship with our brother. For who, on their way to judgment day, is going to get into argument with his brother (:58).

*12:55 And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, There will be a scorching heat- and it comes to pass-* As noted on :54, they were to interpret life as meaning that the Lord's return was imminent- and live with their brother accordingly (:58). The "scorching heat" is the language of condemnation. As they could discern that such heat was coming in the weather, so they ought to be able to have a sense of the reality of the two destinies before them: condemnation, or the showers of Messianic blessing (:54). And awareness of these things would affect how they lived with their brother and remove all divisions- which is the context.

*12:56 You hypocrites-* Hypocrisy may seem a strange charge to level at men who could read the weather but did not want to perceive the fact

that there were definite outcomes to their lives, either showers of eternal blessing, or the scorching heat of condemnation. The charge of hypocrisy would seem to me to imply that they realized indeed who Jesus was, but were acting as if they didn't. The Lord said as much in designing a later parable to have the Jews saying "This is the heir; come, let us kill Him" (Mt. 21:38). Another option is that their ability to read basic signs in the weather made them responsible to discerning who Christ was and their need to repent; and to not use our potential abilities is perhaps seen by the Lord as hypocrisy.

*You know how to interpret the signs of the earth and the sky, but how is it you do not know how to interpret this time?*- The "time" can be seen as the whole work of Jesus, rather than specifically the signs of His coming again. The "sign[s]" which they sought for were in front of them at the time of their asking for them. They therefore cannot really refer to fulfilled latter day prophecies. The lesson is that as farmers and shepherds act accordingly as they interpret the weather, so we ought to respond to the reality of Christ, knowing that we stand before either eternal life or eternal death, very soon.

*12:57 And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?*- We are to have an abiding sense of the imminent coming of the Lord, and the two possible outcomes it brings for us (showers of eternal blessing, or scorching heat of condemnation). If we have this perception, then we will judge rightly "for" or "among" ourselves. There will be no division amongst us (:51), only urgent forgiveness (:58)- which is the only 'right judgment' we can make.

The Lord warned the Jews that they were not discerning the signs of their times as they ought to- i.e. they were not paying heed to the imminence of the day of the Lord which was to come in AD70, and neither were they perceiving that Israel's king was in fact amongst them. He went straight on to tell them a parable about the need to agree with our brother, because they were on their way to judgment. He links these two themes, of their not discerning the signs of the times and their disagreement with their brother, with the question as to why they cannot judge rightly. He seems to be saying that their discernment of the reality of His coming in judgment was to be connected with their discernment of the need for love and forgiveness of their brother. The same basic link is found in Heb. 10:25, where we are exhorted to meet together and encourage one another "and so much the more, as you see the day approaching". See on Mt. 5:25.

*12:58 For as you are going with your adversary before the magistrate, on the way give diligence to be rid of him. Lest he drag you to the judge and the judge shall deliver you to the officer, and the officer shall throw you*

*into prison*- See on :57 and Lk. 6:47. There is an urgency here- related to the fact that very soon, relatively speaking, we shall stand before judgment day and face either eternal showers of blessing, or the eternal death symbolized by the "scorching heat".

The Christian life is likened to a man on his way to his judge along with his adversary; and evidently, he ought to settle his differences with his brother before he arrives, for this judge will be extremely hard upon those who cannot be reconciled to their brethren. This would suggest that the Lord foresaw that getting along with our brethren would be a major part in the development process of His people; and as they draw closer to the day of meeting with Him, the more urgent is the need to settle their disputes, as He will be unsympathetic towards them. The Lord prefaces this parable by appealing for His people to 'judge righteously' because His judgment is about to come (Lk. 12:57 Gk.). By forgiving our brother and reconciling with him, we are judging righteously; we are in essence deciding our own judgment which is to be revealed at the Lord's return- see on Mt. 13:47.

The Lord taught that our focus upon Him and His return should affect how we feel about others, even our enemies. Lk. 12:54-59 continues a theme of living appropriately to a belief that we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The Lord pictures us as walking to meet our judge, along with our adversary. And His parable assumes that we will automatically be found in the wrong, the case will go against us; and so therefore we better make peace with our adversary and drop the case. We are walking towards the day of judgment, our meeting with our Judge. The bottom line is that we should not be walking to judgment day carrying with us a case against our brother. Drop it, whatever it is. At least, in our hearts. It's simply impossible to live at peace with all- Paul spoke from much personal experience of living at peace with others inasmuch as it depends upon *us*: "If it be possible, as much as depends upon you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). Again, this doesn't mean that abuse shouldn't be challenged and exposed. It should be. But we as sinners shouldn't be walking to judgment day carrying with us the weight of a case against our brother.

12:59 *I say to you, you shall never get out, until you have paid the very last coin*- This could mean that the only reconciliation is in death, the last coin we have being our own life itself. This is the price for refusing to forgive and be reconciled. Whilst the Catholic idea of purgatory is incorrect, it could also be that judgment will be for our education; for it is for our benefit, not the Lord's, who already knows all things. And we can imagine those who have been unforgiving in this life learning the error of their ways, experiencing the dread prospect of condemnation before them, and then 'getting out' by grace. To live eternity in humbled

awareness of grace, and how they ought to have been more forgiving in this brief life.

## CHAPTER 13

13:1 *Now there were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices-* We see here Pilate's apparently total lack of conscience, which fits with the picture we get of him from other historical sources. Yet the Gospels present him as a man of finely tuned conscience who wriggled terribly and felt awful about allowing the Lord's death. There is no contradiction. He was as history states; but encounter with the Lord in His time of dying is enough to soften the conscience of even a Pilate. We should never think that anyone is too far gone, or is utterly insensitive to our message of a crucified Jesus.

13:2 *And he answered and said to them: Do you think that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they have suffered these things?-* The Lord assumes here that all Galileans are sinners, but those Galileans might be supposed to be worse sinners. And yet the Lord was perceived and self-identified as a "Galilean". We have here an example of how the Lord identified with sinners and was within the 'sinner' category, without being a personal sinner.

13:3 *I tell you no, but unless you repent, you shall all in like manner perish-* He answers that *all* humanity are under danger of eternal judgment and they needed to start worrying about themselves rather than worrying about God's justice [or otherwise] with those Galileans. And the Lord follows this up with the parable of the unfruitful tree which by rights should be cut down, but He was urgently pleading for more time in order that it might bring forth fruit. In other words, the Lord's audience were to realize the intense urgency of *their* position rather than worrying about the justice of others' judgment. Their personal situation was *so* urgent, they really were to worry about bringing forth fruit, rather than being side-tracked by the issues connected with the suffering and possible judgment of *others*. It's not that these matters don't have importance; it was simply that those asking those questions of Jesus were in such a personally urgent position that they just had to get that right. And this seems to me most relevant to those who will not get personally themselves right with God because of their complaint about His justice with others. And Luke's record develops the theme yet further. In Lk. 13:23 we read of Him being asked the perennial question- why will only few be saved? His answer is simply to speak of the utter horror of personal rejection by the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment- knocking on the door, thinking this is your old friend's house, to be told "I never knew you". The idea is clearly to worry about the future which we may personally miss rather than debating the unsearchable issues of why, apparently, few will be saved. Same again with Peter's question as to whether the Lord's predictions of condemnation refer to the disciples or to the unbelieving world (Lk. 12:41)- the Lord's response was simply to speak about the need to personally be always prepared for the Lord's

coming. And so it is with us- don't worry about who may be condemned, worry about your own personal readiness and how you will respond in that split-second moment when we know for sure 'He's back!'.

"In like manner" may have had a literal element to it; for Josephus records how in AD70 the blood of the slain rained together with the blood of the sacrifices.

13:4 *Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them. Do you think that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem?*- Urgent response in view of coming judgment is a repeated theme in the teaching of Jesus. His servants are to wait in hourly anticipation of His return (Mk. 13:34-36; Lk. 12:36-38); the day of reckoning is even now at hand, all our guilt will be uncovered, and we should act now before it is too late (Lk. 16:1-8). We are as a guilty man about to be hauled to court, whose only way out is to make peace with his offended brother (Mt. 5:25,26). Unless we repent, a great tower is about to fall upon us. Jesus saw Divine judgment as something imminent, something which is essentially happening now, and therefore day by day we need to live accordingly. He insisted that any supposition that life will simply carry on as it is... was a fatal delusion. He piercingly dismantles our natural human assumption that life can be broadly maintained as it is or simply adapted a little. There is an urgent need to *change* and to keep on being *transformed* in the new life in Him. So the urgency of response is because the Lord is coming back soon, but also because He is right now our constant and insistent judge. Our generation particularly ought to have a sense of urgency. For I will go on record as saying that I do truly believe the Lord may very well come in our time. He is near, even at the doors. Written in our lives, as a neon sign in the black of our human lives, should be the simple reality: *Jesus Is Coming*.

13:5 *I tell you no, but unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish*- In AD70, many were killed by falling masonry. But this is likely not the Lord's idea, for given the short lifespans of the time, those He was then speaking too largely died in their beds rather than in the calamities of AD70, some 37 years later. His point was that the common death of all men is no more nor less significant than the dramatic deaths of people in tragedies.

13:6 *And he spoke this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit thereon and found none*- The element of unreality is that there was a fig tree amongst vines. It has been observed that this was never done, because the fig would take up too much of the ground water, the shade of the fig tree would stop anything else growing, and the fig would attract birds which would eat the grapes from the vines. But Israel were God's special enthusiasm and He did this. The idea is perhaps that this tree was the special project of the man. In Matthew 21, the Lord uses the unfruitful *fig* tree as a springboard

for telling the parable of the vineyard. Israel were God's special concern and focus. His passion for them led to Him breaking His own principle, of not planting different seeds together (Lev. 19:19; Dt. 21:9 "do not sow a field of yours with two different kinds of seeds"). Likewise, the Father likens Himself in the prophets to a man who has divorced His wife (Israel) and yet still wants her to come back to Him, even though that was an abomination to Him. Or the Lord telling the one talent man that he ought to have lent out the money for interest, when this was forbidden by the Law.

Or it could be that the Lord is using the fig tree as it was used in Judaism- a metaphor for the religious leaders, in whose shadow their students sat. We would have soon ran out of patience with them; but the Lord's strong desire was that even they should be saved. And some of them did repent and accept baptism after the Lord's resurrection. He set us an example of hoping against hope for response even from the most unlikely; and it paid off.

13:7 *And he said to the vinedresser-* Again the unreality is emphasized; a *vinedresser* is asked to pay special attention to a solitary *fig* tree. See on :6.

*Behold, these three years I came seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?-* The allusion is to the Mosaic principle that such fruit was only clean after three years. After the three years of His ministry, during the Lord's final six months, God suggested to Him that the nation of Israel be cut down (this is but one example of the private intercourses between Father and Son). The Lord knew when He must die soon; He had already steadfastly set His face to go to die at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51). It seems to me that He knew He would be killed by the Jews in a few months' time. But He asks the Father to spare Israel for at least another year- as if to show that He knew they wouldn't accept Him even after His death, but He's saying to God: 'Give them a chance even after they kill me'. Those who think further along the lines suggested by the parable will see that in reality, Israel were not cut down by God for another 37 years. The implication is that this was due to Christ's pleading with God during those years for patience to be shown to the nation who rejected and crucified Him. The element of unreality in the story reflects the grace of Jesus- for it was unthinkable for a servant to argue back with his master, asking not to do what he had been ordered to do.

13:8 *And he answering said to him: Master, leave it alone this year also, I shall dig about it and fertilize it-* We have here another element of unreality, in that fig trees needed little attention compared to vines. But there was a huge effort made to get fruit from this fig tree, as if it were an almost idiosyncratic obsession of the owner. This speaks of the deep, passionate level of concern that there should be fruit.

The relationship between servants and master in the parables is also at times somewhat unreal. It's hard for us to imagine how slaves belonged to their masters and had to do their will and not their own. Yet in the parable of Lk. 13:7,8, the servant is commanded by his master to cut down the fig tree. Not only does the servant take a lot of initiative in saying that no, he will dig around it and try desperately to get it to give fruit; but, he says, if even that fails, then *you*, the Master, will have to cut it down... when he, the servant, had been ordered to do it by his master! This servant [the Lord Jesus] obviously has a most unusual relationship with the Master. He suggests things on his own initiative, and even passes the job of cutting off Israel back to God, as if He would rather not do it. And it's in a way the same with us. See on Lk. 12:37; 14:22.

The Lord of His own volition asked the Father not to destroy Israel at the time He planned, but to give them longer to repent. This was exactly the spirit of Moses' pleas for Israel. But this is not the same as 'relaying' the words of human prayers to God. This is undoubtedly how many of us conceive of Christ's intercessory role for us; but is this actually what Scripture teaches? Many of the relevant Scriptures which speak of Christ's activity for us before the Lord God are not in this context; they suggest that He of His own will prays to the Father on our behalf concerning things which are on His agenda for us, not ours. If we confess Christ before men, i.e. reveal Him to them, He will confess us, reveal us favourably, in the court of Heaven, before the Father and the Angels (Lk. 12:8).

This parable could suggest that the Lord's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be!

So often, the parables [as well as the Lord's teaching generally] appear to be Him almost talking to Himself. The Lord spoke of how it was His Father's plan to cut down the Jewish fig tree; but He asked His Father if it could remain for another year, until He had dug around it and spread dung by it (Lk. 13:8)- and *then* it could be destroyed, if there was still no fruit. The Lord Jesus was thinking here of His crucifixion- for this was the reason for the final cutting down of the Jewish fig tree. To dig was the work of a slave- recall how the disgraced steward felt ashamed to dig (Lk. 16:3). And to spread dung was the work of the very lowest slave. And yet this was how the Lord foresaw His death- becoming as the lowest slave. Yet His hope in doing this was that Israel would bear spiritual fruit. This, then, is to be the motivational effect upon us of meditating upon the Lord's ultimate servanthood in His death- spiritual fruit in *our* lives just *has* to be elicited by it, lest we too will be cut down.

He sent His servants the prophets to find the fruit- but they were beaten and murdered. He finally sent His Son, reasoning that "*surely* they will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37). But they murdered Him. I have suggested elsewhere that this language can only suggest that God in some sense limited His omniscience and omnipotence in order to fully enter into our dimensions; and hence His experience of dashed hope and deep disappointment. Amazing as the Father's hopefulness was, His Son's was even greater. This Father who had had all this experience of simply not getting any fruit, asked His vinedresser (the Lord Jesus) to cut down the tree of Israel, as for the three years of Christ's ministry He had sought fruit from them and not found any; and further, this tree was 'cumbering the ground', taking away nutrients which He could have given to another (Gentile) tree. But His servant argues back with Him; the servant asks to be allowed to dig and dung around the tree; and then, he says, '*You* can cut it down, although you asked *me* to do this job'. This was quite unusual for a servant to talk like this; but it's an insight into the way the Lord Jesus was even more hopeful than His longsuffering Father. The Lord was prepared to dig around the tree- and digging was the lowest, most shameful occupation (Lk. 16:3). Further, He would shovel dung, making Him unclean and despised of men. He *so* wanted fruit on Israel. This describes the intense effort of the Lord Jesus during the last six months of His ministry. His attitude was summarized when shortly before He died, He came hungry to a fig tree, expecting to find just the immature beginnings of fruit there, which He would gladly have eaten. But that particular tree had nothing on it. His deep hunger and willingness to eat anything reflected His willingness to find some spirituality from Israel. But He "found none", just as there was "not found" any of those Jews He healed who would glorify God (Lk. 17:18 s.w. Lk. 13:6). This longsuffering, patient, passionate desire for spiritual fruit in the Lord Jesus is presented as being even stronger than it was in His Father. No wonder John the Baptist misunderstood the extent of Christ's grace- he proclaimed that Jesus already had the axe aimed at the bottom of the trees (Mt. 3:10; Lk. 3:9), and was about to fell them. The situation truly demanded this- but actually the Lord Jesus waited three years for fruit, and when it didn't come, even then He pleaded with the Father not to fell the tree but let Him dig and dung it... We must factor all this into our understanding of Mt. 7:19, where the Lord apparently in a bland, matter-of-fact manner teaches that the tree that doesn't bear good fruit will be hewn down and burnt. This burning is ultimately at the judgment day; but all our lives He is earnestly seeking to develop spiritual fruit upon us; as in the parable of the sower, only those who produce totally nothing will be rejected. Of course our fruit must be the fruit that abides- the changes in personality which are permanent, the converts who remain, the forgiveness which is maintained on a felt level, the generosity never later regretted... But if there's even something of this, then it seems this is what the Lord is so eagerly seeking. Earlier, Israel were the vine and the

Lord Jesus the vinedresser (Lk. 13:7). But now we are the vine, and God Himself the vinedresser (Jn. 15:1). We are in good hands; and the Father and Son who through Biblical history showed themselves so sensitive to spiritual fruit are the very same ones who will meet us in the last day.

13:9 In the parable of Lk. 13:8,9, the Lord portrays Himself as even reasoning with God, who had decreed the Jewish tree be cut down in the third year of His ministry. He as it were persuades God to allow His efforts to continue for another six months, in desperate hope against hope that there would be some fruit of repentance. We, to a man and to a woman, would have given up on Israel, and would have somehow been gratified that the Father wanted to treat them like this. I would have turned to the Gentiles a long time before the Lord and Paul did.

13:9 *Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you shall cut it down-* Here we have another insight into the open-ended nature of God's purpose. His intention was to bring an end to the fig tree, either Israel or the Jewish leadership represented by the fig tree; but His Son argued for more time, and He agreed. The amazing extent and power of the Lord Jesus is further brought out in the story of the worker in the vineyard who can almost direct His boss- the Father- not to cut down the barren fig tree of Israel until it has more chance to bear spiritual fruit- "if not, *you* shall cut it down". Speaking to crowds of day labourers and farm workers, this would have struck them as strange- that this worker had such power over his boss. See on Lk. 11:21.

13:10 *And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day-* This "teaching" would have been in the period when comments were invited; He was not a synagogue rabbi with His own local congregation. His continued teaching effort is an exemplification of His continuing work with the fig tree (:8).

13:11 *And a woman was there who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years; she was bent over and could in no way straighten herself-* Bullinger has some interesting comments upon the woman with an unclean "spirit of infirmity" (Lk. 13:11) that resulted in her being unable to lift herself up straight. "The negative is *me*, not *ou*; and is therefore subjective. She *felt as if* she could not do so... it appears, therefore, to have been a *nervous disorder*; and had to do with her *pneuma*" or mind. And yet she is described as having been 'bound by Satan'. The 'Satan' or adversary to her standing upright was her own mindset. And it was this spirit or mindset "of infirmity" from which the Lord released her. Here we clearly see the connection between 'spirits' and mental disorder or dysfunction; for 'spirit' in Scripture so often refers to the psychological mindset of a person.

The description of the woman has several links with the time of the Judges; there were two periods of 18 year domination (Jud. 3:14; 10:18), and they were likewise stooping in affliction and unable to stand up in

their own strength because of the power of their oppressors. She was a "daughter of Abraham" (:16), representative of Israel. All the judges / saviours of Israel pointed forward to the Lord as Israel's 'Jesus', Yah's salvation.

13:12 *And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her: Woman, you are free from your infirmity-* "Free" is literally 'let loose', and is also used of forgiveness. So often, the Lord's healings were acted parables of freedom from sin. She was 'freed' before the Lord laid His hands upon her. The two stages in the healing were perhaps to give her a chance to respond to His calling of her and then to believe in His promise of freedom / release. When she responded positively, then the potential was unleashed by His touch (:13). The same process is seen in His work with people today.

13:13 *And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God-* Again we note the Lord's usage of physical touch. This touch was technically unnecessary; in that He had just stated that she was freed from her weakness by His word alone (:12). But He wished to demonstrate His total identity with human weakness, which is one reason why He was baptized. This healing happened as the Lord was teaching in the synagogue (:10), so presumably He called the woman out of the audience to be cured. He presented the healing as an acted parable of the power of His word in human life.

13:14 *And the ruler of the synagogue, being moved with indignation because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, answered and said to the crowd-* This anger was at the same time as the woman glorified God, presumably in words of genuine praise (:13). The Lord had healed the woman during the synagogue service as He was teaching, in order to demonstrate and exemplify the real power of His word. The synagogue ruler had never been able to do anything like it. The anger was therefore rooted in jealousy. The words and teaching of that man were nothing like those of the Lord. And so jealousy led him to latch on to the Lord's technical infringement of rabbinic law.

*There are six days in which men ought to work. In them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day-* The Sabbath was a day of "rest". The Hebrew word for "rest" means not only a cessation of labour, but literally a sending away, a departing; and it is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word used in :12 for how the woman had been set free, sent away, released from her burdens (:15). The Lord had in fact fulfilled the spirit of the Sabbath by this healing. The synagogue ruler either capitulated to the glorious Spirit being revealed in all this; or turned away into the anger and bitterness of legalism. And religious people today face the same choice when they encounter the gracious action of the Lord.

13:15 *But the Lord answered them and said: You hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath release his ox or his ass from the stall and lead him away for watering?*- The Lord described His healing of her as losing her from a bond in order to lead her away to the water of life- this is the very cameo of all the redeemed in Rev. 7:17. "Release" is similar in meaning to the Hebrew word for "rest". The Lord had not only released or 'sabbathed' this woman, but was leading her away to the water of the Spirit filled life.

13:16 *And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound for eighteen years, to have been freed from this bond on the Sabbath day?*- As noted above, the Hebrew idea of 'Sabbath' was of release and freedom. It was appropriate for her to be healed on the Sabbath of all days.

The woman "had" a spirit which was associated with her being bent over (Lk. 13:11). She was not attacked by a "spirit" from outside of her, but she "had" this spirit within her. "Spirit" is commonly to be understood in Biblical usage as an attitude of mind. She had an attitude of mind which disabled her. And this spirit came from an adversary, a satan. And that adversary is explained in the context- the "adversaries" were the Jewish system who had so crippled the woman (:17). There is no explicit statement that "Satan", the adversary, controlled the "spirit". That has to be assumed by those who wish to see that idea, but the text itself doesn't support it. The Lord is not recorded as doing spiritual battle with Satan or any evil spirit; He simply said "Woman, you are free from your infirmity". He dealt directly with the issue of her illness. And it was "*your* infirmity", just as the woman "had" a disabling spirit. The source of her illness was within her, internal to her rather than having been imposed by some external, cosmic entity.

I have [elsewhere](#) outlined the connection between "Satan" and the Jewish opposition to Jesus; for they were the main adversary / satan to His work and that of the early church. The connection is made explicit in this passage- the Jews are called Christ's "adversaries" (:17), as if explaining who the 'satan' was who had 'bound' the woman. The woman's binding by Satan is connected with the fact she was "a daughter of Abraham", a Jewess. Why make this otherwise throwaway comment, that she was a Jewess? For we are led by the context to assume that obviously she was Jewish. The point surely is that the Jewish system had 'bound' this woman. I suggested [elsewhere](#) that many of the diseases the Lord cured had a psychological basis to them; His healing of minds was reflected in the healing of bodies from conditions which had been brought about psychologically. Just as He "loosed" the woman from her illness, so He "loosed" sinners from the burden of their sin [the same word is used in Mt. 18:27 in this connection, and is twice translated "to forgive" in Lk. 6:37]. It may've been that it was her sense of unforgiven sin which was the actual psychosomatic cause of her strange physical condition. The woman's physical condition- being chronically bowed down- may well have been her body reflecting how her mind felt, bowed down by the heavy burdens the Jewish

leaders placed upon her. And of course the Lord uses that very figure in describing the weight placed upon Jewish people by the teachers of Judaism (Mt. 23:4- "They bind heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders; but they will not move them with their finger"). The context of the miracle is that the Jews loosed their tied up animals on the Sabbath, and Jesus reasoned that He likewise could loose His sheep who had been bound or tied up by Satan. But who tied up the animals whom the Jewish leadership loosed? They themselves bound / tied them and loosed them. Jesus says that He looses / unties those whom Satan has tied up. He thus draws a parallel between the Jewish leadership and Satan, the adversary to His work. The unloosing was performed on the Sabbath- the very day whose Mosaic regulations the Jews had abused to burden people. Significantly, Jn. 5:18 uses the same word translated "loose" to describe how Jesus was accused of 'breaking' or 'unloosing' the Sabbath. He did not come to destroy the Law of Moses itself during His lifetime, but to teach Israel that the Jewish additional laws were to be unloosed. The same Greek word is used in other contexts of how Jesus through His death unloosed ['took down'] the wall of partition which excluded Gentiles (Eph. 2:10).

Without doubt there is a word play going on: "And ought [*dei* - must] not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound [*deo* - a form of *dei*, literally, 'must-ed'] for eighteen years, to have been freed from this bond [*deis-mon*, another form of *dei*, this 'must-ing'] on the Sabbath day?". Who was it who had taught the woman 'You must this, that and the other; you must not this or that'? Was it Satan in the sense of a personal, cosmic being? Was it surely not the Jewish system who were 'must-ing' people? They, therefore, were the adversary in this context.

13:17 *And as he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the crowd rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him-* "Adversaries" suggests the Jewish opposition were His 'satan' or 'adversary'; see on :16. The synagogue ruler was not alone in being jealous. Shame was a huge issue in first century Palestinian society. We can assume that those who were shamed went away to scheme how they could destroy the Lord. The tension is clearly brought out between "the crowd" and the religious leaders. This was only six months before the Lord's death (:7). Yet this fickle "crowd" were to be so easily manipulated by the religious leaders to scream for the Lord's crucifixion. We see here how limited is the power of miracle to achieve abiding conviction in human hearts, and this explains why the Lord used miracles so sparingly compared to what He was capable of.

13:18 *He replied: To what is the kingdom of God like? And unto what shall I liken it?-* Perhaps we are to sense here the struggle to compress the wonder of God's Kingdom into any parable or simile. The small seed of the Gospel of the Kingdom can produce a mighty tree in the Kingdom (Lk. 13:18,19). It is easy to under-estimate the power of that seed- the

Lord's parable seems to be making that point. I would seriously suggest that *all* of us ought to regularly study the basic doctrines of our One Faith for ourselves, personally. The writer told the Hebrews that he would have to lay *again* the foundation teachings of the Gospel, in order to renew them *again* unto repentance (Heb. 6:1-4).

13:19- see on Lk. 6:47.

*It is like a grain-*

Gk. 'a kernel'. The element of unreality is that a man would not consciously sow one tiny seed in a garden. But the Lord does this, knowing the potential power within that one tiny seed. He 'takes' this one tiny seed [in his palm, we are to imagine] out into the garden and sows it. And the mustard bush was perceived as a weed, a wild bush, not a crop. But it grows into a tree, it grows far greater and more majestically than could ever be expected. Here again is the Lord's encouragement to His disillusioned preachers- the growth of the Gospel, rather like the unreal increase on the good ground, is out of all proportion to what it initially is. Preaching appears 'foolish' (1 Cor. 1:18,21); that by sharing the Gospel with others, the vast majority of whom ultimately reject it, something so wonderful and eternal can really come. This parable thereby highlights the faith of the Father and Son, the sowers, that the word of the Kingdom really would survive and grow out of all proportion to its beginnings. This was exactly the encouragement which the disciples needed to hear, disillusioned as they were by the pathetic response to John's ministry and the Lord's real spiritual demands upon people.

*Of mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden-* But mustard trees aren't *this* big. Surely the point is that the small seed of the Gospel produces a quite out of proportion result- by reading literature, spotting a press advertisement, getting baptized... we will by grace become part of the Kingdom of God, and provide shelter to the nations of this world. This is the extraordinary power of the Gospel. This is how far it will take us, and the extent to which we can, through the Gospel, become saviours of men. See on Mt. 13:33. Each of the records of the great preaching commission in the Gospels ties in with earlier passages within the same Gospel record. Mark's "preach the gospel to every creature" is to be understood in the context of the Lord's prophecy that the seed of His Gospel would be sown by preaching, and would result in creatures of all kinds coming under its' shadow (Mk. 16:15 cp. 4:32). The extent of witness we make is our choice; and according to how well we do it, so the extent of the shadow of the Kingdom gives shelter to many kinds.

*And it grew and became a tree-* The tiniest seed was only supposed to grow into a bush, but this unusual seed 'became' a tree, *ginomai* carrying the sense of being 'caused to become'. This was another element of the

unreal- a shrub became a tree. The emphasis is on the word "it"- when *this* particular tiny seed grows... The point is that this particular tiny seed had extraordinary growth. This on one hand speaks of the amazing growth experienced by the believer from the apparently tiny beginnings of the Gospel. The entire parable may refer to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate seed, tiny and despised, yet who grew to become the Kingdom of God under whose branches the Gentile world would find blessing. For 'the Kingdom' was a legitimate title for Jesus, the King of the Kingdom who embodied it in His very person (Lk. 17:21). If here the Lord (as elsewhere) is speaking parables to and about Himself, it would in this context be in encouraging others as to the huge extent of growth possible. For Jesus is the parade example of how something which began so small- an egg within the womb of a barefoot unmarried teenager- could become so great.

*And the birds of the sky lodged in the branches of it-* A mustard bush doesn't have 'great' branches, but in this unreal story, it does have them. According to the Lord's parable of Jn. 15:5, the branches represented the disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches". The total greatness of the Lord Jesus depends to some extent upon the degree to which we grow into great branches. The disciples were depressed at the lack of response to their message, and the failure of John's ministry in first century Palestine. The Lord is encouraging them personally that from their *mikro*, tiny beginnings, they would become great branches, and be able to provide shelter for the birds of the Gentiles; although the "birds" in the earlier parable of the sower were representative of the Jewish religious leaders. When the disciples later baptized priests and Pharisees, the Lord's ambitious vision began to come true.

There are a number of insights throughout the parables into how the Lord perceived His future Kingdom. Significantly, His emphasis in the parables of the Kingdom is upon our spiritual status then, rather than on the physical wonders which His reign will bring on the earth. He foresaw how although our faith is so puny now, as a mustard seed, we will be those who will be as a solid tree, a real place of refuge, to the nations of the Millennium (Mt. 13:31,32 = Ez. 17:23,24).

The parables reveal how the Lord was so sensitive to us. He realized that his audience thought in pictures; and so He turned concepts and ideas into imaginable pictures in a truly masterful way. He wanted to radically change people; and He realized that the way to do this was not by a catechism, not by pages or hours of intellectual, abstract droning, but by helping them to relate real, imaginable life to the things of His Kingdom. Truly did W.H. Auden reflect: "You cannot tell people what to do, you can only tell them parables; and that is what art really is, particular stories of particular people and experiences". The way the Lord Jesus constructed and taught His parables was indeed an art form, of exquisite beauty. He took ordinary, homely stories and introduced into them the elements of

unreality which we will explore in this study. By being so normal, He created the possibility of participation in the minds of His hearers; because they could relate to the very normalcy of the stories. And so when the unreal elements are perceived- e.g. the mustard seed becomes not just a bush but a huge tree- there is an element of surprise and joy. Out of, and indeed right within, the most ordinary things of life, there await for the believer the surprise and joy of 'the Gospel of the Kingdom' intersecting with their ordinary lives.

The Lord Jesus was highly sensitive to the gender division. He did not just ignore it. The parable of the mustard seed which a man planted is followed by that of the leaven which a woman hid in the meal (Lk. 13:18-21). Likewise in Lk. 15:3-10 Jesus speaks firstly of the joy of a man finding a lost sheep, and then of the joy of a woman on finding a lost dowry coin. He spoke of the lilies of the field which do not physically exert themselves in labour, as men must do, but also who do not spin (women's work). Christ spoke of the second coming as finding two men in the field and two women grinding at the mill. This parallelism of attention between men and women can be profitably followed through the Gospel records: Lk. 8:14,15 cp. Lk. 8:16,17; Lk. 11:5-8 cp. 18:1-8; Lk. 4:24-27; Mt. 24:43-51 cp. 25:1-13; 24:40,41; Mt. 13:31-33 cp. Lk. 13:18-21. This approach contrasts sharply with the male-centred teaching approach of the contemporary rabbis and other religious leaders. Thus His parables were consciously designed to appeal to both men and women. Luke particularly seems to rejoice in observing how the Lord treated men and women in parallel. Both Martha and the male ruler lack one thing (Lk. 10:41,42 cp. 18:22); there are two parables on answered prayer for men and women (Lk. 11:5-8 cp. 18:1-8); the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South are paired (Lk. 11:29-32); justice is for both male and female servants (Lk. 12:45,46); both men and women would be divided (Lk. 12:51-53); a woman and a man are both healed on the Sabbath (Lk. 13:10-16; 14:1-6); a 'daughter of Abraham' and a 'son of Abraham' are healed (Lk. 13:16; 19:9); the woman loses a coin, a man loses a sheep (Lk. 15:4-10). Indeed, a profitable study could be made of how the Old Testament prophets liken God to both male and female figures in tandem- e.g. "The Lord goes forth as a mighty man... I will cry out like a woman in travail" (Is. 42:13,14).

13:20 *And again he said: Unto what shall I liken the kingdom of God?- As noted on :18, perhaps we are to sense here the struggle to compress the wonder of God's Kingdom into any parable or simile.*

13:21 *It is like the yeast which a woman took-* The good news of God's Kingdom, in both present and future aspects, is like yeast which works away *from the inside* of a man and *inevitably, by its very nature* makes a fundamental change. Because whoever really believes the doctrines of the One Faith and lives the life which they naturally bring forth, really will be

saved. Therefore we will have a sense of true unity with our brethren who believe as we do, whatever human barriers there may be between us. Therefore "the Faith" is linked with unity between believers (Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:27).

This continues the theme of the preceding parable; which was about a *man*, and now He tells a similar story balanced out with a *woman* as the central figure. Again the point is that from tiny beginnings, great influence comes. And as a note in how to perform Biblical exegesis, we should learn here that because yeast is used negatively in some Bible passages, it doesn't *always* have to require that meaning. The Gospel which we preach is likened to yeast- in itself a startling comparison- because it is through our humanity that we will influence others, by being our real, human selves. Yet the woman mixing yeast is preparing a huge amount of bread, according to the specifications in Mt. 13:33. This is perhaps to show us that whilst our influence may be quiet and unseen, the quietest witness can have a huge influence. W.D. Davies quotes Pliny and the Mishnah, giving examples of the use of yeast as a *positive* symbol (W.D.Davies, *Matthew* p. 422).

*And hid-* The teaching of Jesus works quietly from within- that could be the sense. Just as the tiny seed of the Gospel produces huge results finally, so the yeast of the Gospel has disproportionate influence. But we must give full weight to the Lord's other teachings about hiddenness. We are to become a city set on a hill which *cannot* be hid (Mt. 5:14; our good works "cannot be hid", 1 Tim. 5:25); it is the rejected who hide the talent of the Gospel so that nobody sees it (Mt. 25:25). Ultimately, the yeast hidden within us at the time of sowing the seed, at the time the yeast is first inserted into the dough, will become public. In the wider context of this section, the Lord is explaining to the disciples the tragedy of how the seed or yeast first sown by John the Baptist has not achieved its intended result- because people were still hiding it, as Joseph and Nicodemus did (Jn. 19:38 s.w.- Joseph was a 'secret' or 'hidden' disciple). And we find the same word just two verses later in Mt. 13:35- the Lord was now speaking forth publicly things which had been 'hidden' (AV "kept secret") in the Old Testament period. The treasure was "hid" in the field of the world, but the Lord Jesus gave all that He had so that He could redeem / buy the world, the field, and bring the hidden treasure to light (Mt. 13:44). Perhaps we could say that the yeast was only hidden to those who did not have eyes to see; for that has been the context of the Lord's teaching here (see on 13:10).

*In three measures of flour, until it was all raised-* Until the flour was completely influenced. The hint could be that when the Gospel, the yeast, has done its complete work and the flour is finally completely leavened into a loaf- then the Lord will come. His work then will be complete. The calendar date of the Lord's return is therefore 'open' to some extent, just

as the harvest is reaped only when the fruit (of the Spirit) has been brought forth.

It's tempting to see some connection with Paul's warning that false teachers must be removed from the church, because a little yeast leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). It could be that he is simply using the figure of yeast in a different sense. But his frequent allusions to the Gospels make us wonder whether he is consciously alluding to the Lord's teaching here. It could be that he is saying 'Get rid of the *old* yeast, the yeast of false teaching and associated unspirituality- and instead, be influenced by the *true* yeast, of Christ's teachings rather than the yeast of *false* teaching'.

13:22 *And he went on his way through cities and villages, teaching and journeying on to Jerusalem-* This was His final appeal to them. For at this point He was in the last six months of His ministry (:7).

13:23 *And one said to him: Lord, are they few that are saved? And he said to them-* See on Lk. 13:1. This question about the ultimate justice of God in saving only some has reverberated throughout the centuries. The Lord gives no direct answer, but instead urges us to strive to enter in to salvation ourselves (:24); as if these kind of philosophical questions are likely to derail us from ourselves entering salvation. The existence of such unanswered questions is purposeful in how God has set up our entire spiritual and mental existence. They are to humble us, and to lead us deeper in clinging on to faith and love of God by our faith rather than by our intellectual understanding. Clarity of understanding such questions would not lead to faith- or else the Lord would have given the answers. But He did not. The next verse goes on to note that there will be many who wish to enter the Kingdom, but all too late- for in this life they didn't want to. This provides helpful perspective to the question of why few shall be saved. One angle on it is that actually the majority don't want to be saved, and would not want to be saved even if they were given the opportunity or knowledge. And instead of accusing God of injustice, we should ensure we are not amongst them.

13:24 *Strive to enter in-* The idea of *striving* to enter the Kingdom, the need for such agonizing effort, meant an awful lot to Paul (1 Cor. 9:25; Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). It's fashionable these days to focus upon the certainty of our redemption in Christ and to ignore the warnings about apostasy. In Paul we see a brother who brought these two strands together; because his mind was so Christ and Gospels-centred. He personalized those Gospels, he must have kept thinking to himself 'Now this applies to *me*... it really does...'. What a brother. What an active mind, a mind which he knew had Christ living in it. The Lord answers the

question "Are there few that be saved?" by insisting that we personally strive to enter by the narrow door (Lk. 13:23,24).

Those who "are first" in their own eyes, those who think for sure they will be in the Kingdom, will seek to enter the Kingdom at the day of judgment, but be unable. Those who strive to enter the Kingdom *now* are "last" in their own spiritual assessment; and the first will be made last in the sense that they won't be in the Kingdom. Thus when those who will enter the Kingdom are described as thinking of themselves as "last", this must mean that they think of themselves now as being unworthy of the Kingdom, but as "striving" to be there now, in their minds (Lk. 13:23,24). The likes of Samson died with a confession of unworthiness on their lips- in his case, that he deserved to die the death of a Philistine (Jud. 16:30)- but he will actually be in the Kingdom (Heb. 11:32).

*By the narrow door. For I say to you, many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able-* "Door" here means specifically an entry to a house, not a gate. Entry to the Kingdom is entry to a household, a family, a home. Salvation is not to be enjoyed only by us on an individual level; rather is it about membership of the saved community. And we begin that experience now. The picture of many people striving unsuccessfully to enter in through a door recalls the picture of the Sodomites seeking to find the door of Lot's house and being smitten down in condemnation (Gen. 19:11). Those men represent those who outside a shut door shall be condemned at the Lord's return. So it's not at all that some want to find the way in this life, but can't. Those who wish to find it can find it. The picture here is rather of condemnation at the last day.

"*Many*" of those who call Christ their Lord and who regularly break bread in his presence, where two or three others are gathered believing they are in his name, will find they are rejected, *and they just won't be able to understand why on earth they were rejected* (Lk. 13:24-27 cp. Mt. 18:20). Anyone who thinks the majority of believers must surely make it through to salvation needs to think again. Please God, we will- but "many" (the Greek can mean, but not always, 'the majority') will be in for this inexplicable (to them) rejection, when they were sure they'd lived a good Christian life. Those with spiritual problems are prone to reason that when judgment day comes, they will be able to just shrug their shoulders and walk away from their Lord to eventual death. However, there is every reason to think that the rejected will come to their spiritual senses then, and plead to be allowed to enter the Kingdom. Many will seek to enter into the Kingdom at the judgment but will not be able; and so we should strive now to enter into it. The implication is that if we strive to enter in now, we will enter in then. Everyone will so earnestly seek to enter the Kingdom in the last day, and the urgency of that coming day should be ours today. Ezekiel's prophecies so often make the point that experiencing God's judgments leads men to *know* Him; thus at the day of

judgment, the rejected will knock at the door of the Kingdom, knowing that they know Christ- to be told that although they may now know him, he doesn't know them. Thus the pain of rejection will be acutely mental rather than physical. Ezekiel is told to judge Israel, i.e. "cause them to know the abominations of their fathers" (Ez. 20:4). This is what condemnation will result in- a recognition of sin for what it is. "According to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they [the ways and doings] judge thee" (Ez. 24:14). It will be self-condemnation, but they will then *realize* this in terrible detail.

The Greek for "many" often means 'the majority'. Here perhaps we have the clearest implication that only a minority of those who come to Christ shall ultimately be saved. Hebrews, Romans and 1 Cor. 10 suggest that if we think that natural Israel were far worse than spiritual Israel in terms of percentage coming to salvation- then we must take heed lest we fall.

13:25 *When the master of the house-* The "master of the house" is representative of Jesus; and yet we are to be the "master of the house" in spiritually feeding our brethren (Mt. 24:43,45 RV). It is through us that He ministers to His household.

*Is risen and has shut the door, and you begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying-* This continues the allusion to the men of Sodom outside the locked door; see on :24. We are Christ to our brethren. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7; Lk. 11:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that hated knowledge". The foolish virgins realize the need for prayer all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. They were so convinced they knew the day and hour that prayer for the Lord's return, and prayer to Him generally, somehow was overlooked or felt to be unnecessary.

*Lord-* The Lord had warned that saying "Lord, Lord" would not guarantee "entry" into the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21). And here He is speaking about exactly such "entry"- the same word is used here. The category in view are those who considered themselves believers, who thought that externally correct forms of address would impress the Lord Jesus. The "Lord, Lord" contingent indeed had "done many wonderful works" (Mt. 7:22), but they had never known and loved *Him*. Whilst organized church life is a necessary part of our present experience and the Lord's intention, the danger is that it can exalt such "works" and public appearances to the point that personal relationship with the Lord is totally eclipsed.

Rom. 2:13 alludes here. Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel. The contrast is between saying "Lord, Lord" in this life, and then in the future not entering into the Kingdom. The contrast is between

merely *saying* and actually *doing*. The Lord repeats the idea in His mini parable of the two sons; the one who 'said' he would be obedient, and the other who 'did' the will of his father (Mt. 21:30,31). The acceptance of Christ as Lord means that we are as His servants and slaves; it is for us to 'do' His will and work. This fits with the context of the preceding verses- that if He is really our Lord, we will inevitably *do* His will, and that doing will be actual, practical and visible. It is the false prophets who merely say but don't *do*, just as they claim to be good trees but don't have good fruit.

1 Cor. 13:2 also alludes here. To say "Lord, Lord" without really *knowing* Christ is living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this. Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The repetition of "Lord, Lord" shows that our attitude to Him in this life will be that we have when we meet in the last day. The sensation of working for the Lord can be so self-deceptive. He draws the difference between doing many wonderful works in His name, saying "Lord, Lord"; and *really* doing the will of the Father (Mt. 7:21,22). The parallel Lk. 6:46 has that men will say "Lord, Lord" but not really hear His words. To hear them is to do the will of the Father. Putting all this together, it is perfectly possible to bear His Name, call Him Lord, work hard for Him- and yet never really hear His words, and thereby never really know the will of our Father. From this parallel we can conclude that our attitude to Christ in this life (e.g. "Lord, Lord!") will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. If we think He is a hard, unreasonable Lord: that is how He will be. To the froward (in this life), He will show Himself froward. Straight away we are met head on with a major challenge: Our attitude to Christ in this life will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. John's letters reason down the same line: "If (in this life) our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence (now) toward God... this is the confidence that we have in him... abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence... before him (at the judgment) at His coming" (1 Jn. 3:21; 5:14; 2:28). The confidence we have towards Christ now will be the confidence we have at judgment day. This fact should pull us up out of the spiritual indifference which characterizes so much of our lives. If we see Christ as an abstract theological necessity, a black box in our brain called 'Christ'; if we don't have a dynamic, two- way relationship with Him now- then this too is how we will regard Him then.

*Open to us!- he shall answer and say to you: I do not know who you are-* There is clear linkage with the parable of the foolish virgins in Mt.

25, who likewise end up outside the door, and their knocking is to no avail. "Lord, Lord, open to us" is met with the response "I know you not"; and this connects with an earlier picture of the rejected at judgment day: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not... in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Mt. 7:22,23). Thus there is the implication that when the foolish virgins delay their going to meet Christ, they amass a list of "many wonderful works" which they hope will impress their Lord. This would explain the indignation of the rejected at Christ's rebuke of their lack of suitable works (Mt. 25:41-45). These people would probably not have appeared reprobates in this life; works are so impressive to ones' fellow believers. Jesus did not tell this parable about five hookers and five virgins; *all* of them were 'virgins' in the parable, having an appearance of purity from being in Christ. By contrast, "the wise", whose love for Christ makes them respond immediately to the call, are unconscious of their works of faith (Mt. 25:35-40). "Lord, open to us" is therefore to be read as a confident demand by the unworthy for entry into the Kingdom, based upon trust in their "wonderful works". "I know you not" is paralleled with a lack of oil. The Lord knows His people through their attitude to the oil; whether they have enough or not, or whether they think they do or think they do not, is all so irrelevant. The essence is in wanting the Lord's return.

13:26 *Then shall you begin to say: We did eat and drink in your presence, and you did teach in our streets-* Their experience of Him teaching in their streets could suggest that it was first century Israel who are in view here; for the Lord has just been recorded as teaching in their streets (:22). This is confirmed by verse 28, where the particular rejected ones will find they have been replaced by the Gentiles.

13:27 *And he shall say: I tell you, I do not know from where you are-* From what nation or ethnicity. They were complete strangers, speaking another language. The intended paradox is in that those who were so confident they knew the day and hour actually did not know it (Mt. 25:13), and did not know Christ. They thought knowing the day and hour was the same as knowing Christ; or at least, they put the two together in their minds as one and the same. But they are not. And that is the point of this parable, which is sandwiched in between warnings that we do not and cannot know the day and hour- but we are invited to know Christ personally.

*Depart from me-* See on Mt. 25:36. The rejected will be told: "Depart from me"; and yet in their lives, they will have already departed themselves. In time of temptation some *fall away* (s.w. "depart from"; Lk. 8:13). Some *depart* (s.w.) from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12). Demas departed (2 Tim. 4:10), as the rejected will depart (s.w. Mt. 25:41). The same word is used about how the seed sown among thorns *goes forth*, it

departs (Lk. 8:14) to condemnation. The foolish virgins go, or depart, to buy oil- using the same word with which they are told by their Lord to depart from Him (Mt. 25:9,41). They departed, and so He tells them to depart. Now they willingly absent themselves from the Lord, but then they will not want to depart from Him. God will gather up the nations to thresh them, but they gather themselves to Him (Mic. 4:11,12).

This is alluded to in 2 Tim. 2:19: 'Depart from sin now, or you'll depart from Christ at the judgment'. This is Paul's classic way of making plays on words; again an indication of how his writings are partly a product of his own meditation upon and familiarity with the Gospels.

*All you workers of iniquity-* And yet they have just protested their association with the Lord, and in Mt. 7, all the good they did for others, healing, teaching etc. On one level, good can be done- but the good is a work of iniquity if it is done with an unspiritual heart, and especially in order to gain personal wealth or advantage. In Old Testament times, God used the nations to do His will, but they were still condemned for their hearts being far from Him. Those who "do iniquity" [s.w.] are gathered out of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 13:41)- confirming that these people are within the visible Christian community. And there will be "many" of them- suggesting the Lord doesn't just have in view a handful of charlatans at the leadership level who claim to do miracles and teach in His Name just for money. This problem of thinking that we are justified before Him just because we are His channel of work is clearly foreseen by the Lord as a major and widespread problem. Mt. 24:12 could imply that this will be a specific latter day problem- for within the believing community, "because iniquity [s.w.] shall abound, the love of many [Gk. 'the majority'] shall become cold".

13:28 *There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth-* Either we will mourn now in repentance (Lk. 6:25; the Greek for "mourn" is often in a repentance context), or we will mourn at the judgment. Having foretold the inevitable coming of judgment day, Yahweh Himself pleads with Israel: "Therefore also *now*... turn ye even to me... with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). Gnashing of teeth suggests anger, triggered by seeing Gentiles in God's Kingdom and Jewish people from the time of Jesus rejected. So it is partly anger with self, but also the raging anger which comes from jealousy. We need to meditate upon the way in which actual human beings who met Jesus in the flesh are for sure going to reappear at the day of judgment. On their deathbeds or later in life they may've idly reflected 'Ah yes, there was that Jesus guy I met once, the one they killed, and then a cult started based around Him afterwards'. Such people will reappear at judgment day, and their same basic personality will continue. As they were furious at the Lord's claim that Gentiles would be in God's Kingdom, so they will be in a blind rage about

it still at judgment day. The only other time the Greek for 'gnashing' is used in the New Testament is in Acts 7:54, where again the Jewish conscience was pricked, leading them to gnash upon Stephen. How they were then in the first century is how they will be at the last day. The gnashing of teeth is clearly connected with the anger which comes from jealousy at others' acceptance. One cannot help think of the very many professing believers who have huge anger at the thought of an open table, or of someone they consider to be 'outside' of their small circle breaking bread at the Lord's table. Those same basic structures and constructs of thinking, that same essential personality, will reappear at judgment day. The awesomeness of having been resurrected and actually meeting Jesus in person will not change our basic personalities. Our spirit, in that sense, is preserved. The time for change of attitudes and transformation of character is now. In the OT, gnashing of teeth always means to hate somebody, often the righteous (Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lam. 2:16). Could it not be that the rejected hate their Lord and His people, who will be watching the judgment in some form, and therefore go and join the ranks of the embittered armies that come against Him? Or is their extreme hatred against themselves? Ps. 112:10 speaks of the wicked gnashing with their teeth and melting away, suggesting that the slinking away process goes on even in the outer darkness; they wander, but in their aimless wandering they slowly slink yet further away from their Lord- the one who once faint would have carried them on His shoulders, gathered them under His wings. It's a terrible picture. Cain, in typifying all the rejected, felt that his condemnation was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13).

*When you shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves cast out-* The rejected will see themselves thrust out of the Kingdom; as if somehow they see themselves from outside of themselves. What spirituality they thought they had they will see as it were taken away from them (Lk. 8:18 AV mg.). This will be the result of the judgment process. They will be convinced by the judgment process of all the ungodly deeds which they had not previously been convicted of, e.g. their hard words against their brethren (Jude 15). 1 Cor. 11:32 may also be a reference to the educative effect of judgment: "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world". The world's condemnation will be at the second coming; the judgment and chastening to which Paul refers must therefore be that of the last day. However, in the context he is making the point that our self-examination at the memorial meeting and our response to the chastening hand of God in our present life is in fact a foretaste of that final judgment experience.

Note that the Pharisees will be thrust out of the Kingdom at judgment, implying that in a sense they were part of it before its establishment. This is the huge tragedy of rejection.

13:29 *And they shall come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God-* The mention of the four compass points alludes to the promises to Abraham in Gen. 28;14. The true seed of Abraham were going to take the places of those the Lord is addressing here. And I suggest that this category are those symbolized by the fruitless fig tree of the parable which prefaced this teaching; and the fig tree within the vineyard of Israel perhaps referred specifically to the Jewish religious leadership. They are hereby declared not to be the true seed of Abraham. This paves the way for Paul's declaration that whoever is baptized into the Lord Jesus, Jew or Gentile, is the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29).

"Sit down" is Gk. 'to recline'. The reference is to the Messianic banquet, where Gentile Christians will sit with Abraham and the Jewish fathers (:28)- because they have become the children of Abraham by faith and baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). Lk. 12:37 comments that the Lord will have to *make* the faithful sit down at that banquet- so strong will be our abiding sense that 'I am not worthy of this'.

13:30 *And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last-* In this amazing comment at the conclusion of the section, we learn that in fact some who are first in this life *and choose to remain first* shall still be saved, although they will be "last" in the Kingdom. The same word for "last" is used in the parable which speaks of believers having to take the "last" or 'lowest' place around the Lord's table (Lk. 14:9,10). There are and will be gradations between the Lord's people, both now and eternally. Those who are "first" in this brief life, retaining their wealth when they should not, shall be saved by grace but will be the least in the Kingdom. Whereas those who are the least in this life, or make themselves the least, will become the first in God's Kingdom. Alternatively, we can read "last" here as referring to condemnation, which is what the Lord implies is the destiny of the religious leaders of first century Israel whom He is addressing.

13:31 *In that very hour certain Pharisees came warning him: Get out and leave here. For Herod wants to kill you-* The Lord's response that Herod was a fox (:32) suggests that He saw this as part of a plot. Herod was trying to force Him towards Jerusalem, where there was a better chance the Lord could be arrested and killed rather than in Herod's jurisdiction (23:6,7). The Pharisees were part of this plot, and they therefore brought this message to the Lord. But the Lord died exactly when and in what manner He chose; He was not overtaken by events. He was going to Jerusalem to give His life, it would not be taken away from Him.

We note that when Herod finally met the Lord, he found no fault in Him and no reason for the death penalty for Him (23:15). And yet Herod wanted to kill the Lord at this stage. There was something in the personal

presence of the Lord Jesus which touched even the hardest conscience; Pilate and Herod are parade examples.

13:32 *And he said to them: Go and say to that fox-* Herod was openly hateful towards the Lord Jesus amongst others. "Fox" seems a strange adjective to use for him, as it implies craft, deceit and hypocrisy. Perhaps the Lord is therefore referring to the way Herod was deceitful and fox-like within his own mind, denying the clear prods of conscience which he had felt from his first encounter with John the Baptist's message. Or as suggested on :31, the Lord was not going to be scared out of Herod's jurisdiction and therefore run off to Jerusalem to die there as a result of the plot laid by Herod.

*Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow; and on the third day I shall reach my goal-* The Lord is saying that He is not going to go away immediately. He had work to do, and on the third day He would leave Herod's jurisdiction, once he had perfected His work / reached His goal- which may be a reference to the resurrection of Lazarus. The language of course is appropriate also to His resurrection on the third day. He saw this situation as pointing forward to how His death would also be calmly met by Him, He would not have His life taken away by the likes of Herod but rather He would give it; and then in the resurrection of the third day, He would "reach my goal".

13:33 *Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following. For it cannot be possible that a prophet can die anywhere except Jerusalem-* The Lord did not take seriously Herod's threat to kill Him; because Herod only had jurisdiction in Galilee, and the Lord knew that He must die in Jerusalem. But "Jerusalem" may refer more specifically to the Jewish religious leadership, the condemned fig tree with which this section began. The Lord would then be saying that Herod's plan to scare Him into leaving Galilee and going into the jurisdiction of Jerusalem, so that He would be killed, was actually exactly the Lord's plan. There is no Old Testament prophetic requirement that Messiah or any prophet die in Jerusalem or at the hands of the Jerusalem leadership. But the Lord, as a prophet, had created that requirement, knowing it to be the Father's will. And He was going up to "Jerusalem" exactly to do that; He was doing so of His own freewill and not because He had been driven there from fear of Herod. A Herod had after all sought to kill Him in babyhood, and it had come to nothing.

13:34 *O Jerusalem!*- It was "this generation" which killed the prophets (:35), so why does the Lord specifically talk here about the children of Jerusalem? "Daughter of Zion" was an Old Testament term used for the faithful remnant in Jerusalem. But the way the Lord talks of gathering Jerusalem's residents under His wings is surely because He had a clear vision before Him of how the city would be burnt. For a hen typically gathers her brood under her wings to protect them from a barnyard fire;

or perhaps with the intention of being burnt first to preserve the life of her brood as long as possible. And these were the Lord's feelings to the "Jerusalem" which rejected Him and sought His life; He wanted to save them, to buy them some more time at least (as reflected in the parable of the worker who doesn't want to cut the tree down immediately). But they didn't want to know. It was and is all so tragic.

*Jerusalem that kills the prophets and stones them that are sent to her! How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her own brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*- I suggested on :33 that "Jerusalem" refers not so much to the physical city as to the Jerusalem based religious leadership of Israel. He so wished to have gathered their "children", their converts and those they influenced; but He had had very limited success. The allusion is to the parable of the husbandmen, who killed and stoned the servants / prophets sent to them (Mt. 21:35). Stoning was the punishment for apostasy (Dt. 13:10; Acts 7:59). It was their wilful religious misunderstandings which led them to such violence in practice.

"The Lord builds up Jerusalem: he gathers together the outcasts of Israel" (Ps. 147:2) is alluded to by the Lord here, where He reflects how He would fain have gathered together the children of Jerusalem, "but you were not willing". The words of the Psalm speak as if this is what the Lord God is going to do. But Jesus understood it as being impossible of fulfilment if the outcast children would not allow themselves to be gathered. Likewise the statement that the Lord will build up Jerusalem was made in a restoration context; but again, it was dependent upon the Jews' obedience for its fulfilment. God was and is potentially ready to work with us.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is perhaps most clearly seen in His attitude to Israel. So many of the parables refer in some way to the love of God and Christ for Israel; and their love for rebellious, indifferent Israel is the supreme example of pure grace. He felt towards them as a hen for her chicks. Here again is an element of unreality; a hen whose very own chicks won't be gathered under her wings. This seems to go right against nature; the pain of the rejected parent was there in the experience of the Lord. He wasn't just passively enduring the polemics of the Pharisees; they were His chicks, He really wanted them under His wings (cp. Israel dwelling under the wings of the cherubim). We must ever remember this when we read the records of Him arguing with them and exposing their hypocrisy. He wasn't just throwing back their questions, playing the game and winning, just surviving from day to day with them. He was trying to gather them, and their rejection of His words really hurt Him. Their reproach broke His heart; He didn't just brazenly endure it as we might the ravings of a drunken man (Ps. 69:20).

He lamented over a Zion that sought only to hurt and murder Him. Yet not so many verses later in our Bibles we hear the Lord using the same word in saying that at His coming, the elect would be "*gathered together*" unto Him (Mt. 24:31). He so often had earnestly desired the coming of His Kingdom there and then; to gather His people unto Him. But they would not. It must have been unbearable to be such a sensitive person in such a hard and insensitive, dehumanizing world. "How often..." suggests that there were specific times in His ministry when it would have been potentially possible to gather together Zion's children in one and begin the Kingdom. But they refused.

We see the Lord's humility here in comparing Himself to a female, humble, farmyard animal- and not a proud lion. Many of the descriptions of the Lord in the parables are taken from Old Testament passages describing the feelings of *God* towards Israel, showing the truth of this in the first century context when Israel were still God's people. Thus the Lord's description of Himself as a hen wishing to gather the chicks of Jerusalem is based on Is. 31:5: "As mother-birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem" (Heb.). Lk. 13:8 could suggest that Christ's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be! The gracious desire of the Lord to save even those who crucified Him is the essence of God's saving care in the Old Testament.

13:35 *Look, your house*- The temple had always been called "The house of Yahweh". But now it is was theirs, as the "feasts of the Lord" become the "feast of the Jews". The Lord's table became *their* table (Ps. 69:25,22). They had hijacked God's institutions, just as men today have hijacked the Lord's table and imposed their own guest list and rejection policy upon it. Likewise the Lord called the law of God through Moses as now being "*their* law" (Jn. 15:25). The breaking of bread ritual practiced by the Corinthians was eating their *own* supper and therefore their gatherings were "*not* to eat the *Lord's* supper" (1 Cor. 11:20).

*Is left to you desolate*- The Greek word is used many times and always in the sense of a wilderness. This is the fulfilment of Hos. 2:3, where God through Hosea had threatened to make His beloved "a wilderness". This is the link with the Olivet Prophecy in chapter 23, which develops this theme of the desolation of the temple and a desolating abomination which was to be placed there. Clearly, therefore, the primary intention of the Olivet prophecy was to the Jewish generation and temple in which immediate context the Lord was speaking. The fact the prophecy clearly has latter day applications and did not completely fulfil in AD70 shows that there

was a change of plan, as has often happened in the Divine program, with prophecies being delayed and reapplied in their fulfilment.

*And I say to you, you shall not see me-* The same words are used in Mt. 13:14, "You shall not perceive / see" Christ. Previously, they had 'seen' Christ as Messiah, realizing that this was the heir, and desiring therefore to kill Him. But now the Lord was giving them over to the blindness of their hatred. They would not knowingly crucify God's Son. But He was saying that He now was going to stop them 'seeing' / perceiving Him for who He was, so that they would crucify Him. And they would only again perceive Him as God's Son all too late, when at the day of judgment they uttered the words of Messianic welcome "Blessed is He that comes...". And yet even in this terrible judgment there was interwoven a possibility of hope. They would only perceive Him again as God's Son *when, or, until the time that*, they recognized Him as Messiah in the Messianic words "Blessed is He that comes...". Once they made that repentance, they would again perceive / see Him. However, it could be argued that that is axiomatic. The thrust of the Lord's words is surely that in the day of judgment, all too late, they would perceive Him again as He is in truth. But all too late.

*Until you shall say-* When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins. *Then* the rejected will understand the principles of that parable, crystal clearly. Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"- but be rejected. Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud from Yahweh as they vainly hoped against hope that the returning waters wouldn't somehow reach them... they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18). It could well be that this knowing of Yahweh involves a desperate recounting of their sins, seeing that one of the purposes of condemnation is to make men aware of their sinfulness and the depth of God's grace.

*Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord-* When Jerusalem sees Jesus again, they will be saying: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord". This would suggest they are waiting for Him. And these words being taken from the Passover hallel, it could be that the Lord returns to them at Passover time, when they traditionally expect Him. Indeed, Jerusalem will not see the Lord *until* they say "Blessed is he..."- as if the time of His return depends upon their 'seeing' / perceiving Him beforehand.

At the day of judgment, nobody will be passive and indifferent. Everyone will want to be accepted. All of us who come there will see there is only one way we want. Self-examination will be the order of the day. The virgins will knock on the door and plead for it to be opened. The first century Jews will say "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord".

They will want to be on Messiah's side then. None of us will be vacillating between total commitment and the lazy drifting of our human nature. And our judgment seat is going on now, today. "This splitting of the decision between only two alternatives may seem an over-simplification: we fondly think of ourselves as faced with a continuous range of possibility over which to decide, but in the ultimate that range may be broken down into a number of discrete two-way choices, each one a decision between good and evil" (Ralph Lovelock).

## CHAPTER 14

14:1 *And it came to pass, when he went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees on a Sabbath to eat bread, that they were watching him-* The Pharisees liked to feast on the Sabbath, with the work done by Gentile servants or by non-observant Jews who were beneath their respect. This was clearly a set up situation. All the labour which went into preparing the meal had been done somehow within their legal parameters, but to heal would be outside them. They assumed that Jesus was soft hearted enough to want to heal the person immediately, hence the temptation for Him to 'work' on the Sabbath. This gives a window into the essential person the Lord was, and still is- compassionate, and wishing to immediately engage with our human needs.

14:2 *And before him was a certain man that had the dropsy-* This is another example, along with the language of 'demons', of how illness is described from its appearance to the first century beholders- even if their understanding and perception was wrong. For 'dropsy' was the language describing the man's appearance with drooping, saggy limbs and with the soft tissues sagging down because of excess body water gathered in them. The appearance, as they understood it, became the name for the disease. And they considered mental illness to be the work of demons, and so that language is used- without proving that demons actually exist.

14:3 *And Jesus answering spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying: Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?-* The Lord realized the sick man was a plant, placed carefully "before him" (:2) (and see on :4), and so He took the initiative. The Greek for "heal" means literally to wait upon, to serve. At the meal, there would have been servants waiting upon them- on the Sabbath. The Lord was doing the same, by healing. But that was held to be 'work'; thus the Lord exposed their double standards.

14:4 *But they held their peace. And he took him and healed him, and let him go-* Letting him go implies the man had been planted there, perhaps against his will; see on :3. 'Taking him' before healing him suggests again the Lord used physical touch. He could heal from a distance, but His preferred style was to emphasize His personal connection with those He healed. We sense His desire, to this day, to personally connect with people.

14:5 *And he said to them: Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately draw him up on a Sabbath day?-* God Himself has an urgency for human salvation; the Lord drew a parallel between the man who rushed out to save his animal on the Sabbath, and His waiving of the Sabbath in order to save others. Indeed, the way He did His miracles on the Sabbath rather than waiting shows His sense of urgency; not a day could be wasted for the sake of human scruples. "Which of you shall have a son fallen into a well, and will not straightway

draw him up?" (Lk. 14:5 RV). Wells weren't that wide. Only a small child would fall down one. We can imagine the tragic situation in the home. "Benny's fallen down the well!". And everyone would go running. They wouldn't wait until the Saturday evening. Nor would they worry the slightest about infringing the letter of the law. And so, the Lord explained, that little boy was like the sick men and women, sick both physically and spiritually, whom He saw around Him. There was an *urgency* which He felt about them. And so there should be with us too. We can realize that this world is evil and vain; and yet we can still fail to perceive the tragedy of it all, and the urgency of our task to save at least some. The Father of the prodigal told the servants: "Bring forth *quickly* the best robe" (Lk. 15:22 RV). The indebted man was told to sit down *quickly* and have his debt reduced (Lk. 16:6). There is an urgency in the mediation of mercy towards others.

The Lord's enthusiasm for the salvation of first century Israel (and us too) comes out in Lk. 14:5 RSV, where He likens the *urgency* of His mission to that of a man whose son has fallen down a well. He simply *must* get there, regardless of the Sabbath rules. And this, says the Lord, is His all-out urgency to save men. We have all fallen down the pit from whence we must be rescued (Zech. 9:11). As we distribute leaflets, place our adverts, talk to our contacts, strive in our own character development towards salvation; this is the verve of the Lord Jesus to save us. It is only the hardness of the human heart that can stand in the way of the mighty enthusiasm of the Son of God for our redemption. Hence the sense of hurt, sadness and frustration to the Master when men refuse His efforts, as typified in the story of the wonderful banquet that was inexplicably spurned by the intended guests (Lk. 14:16). In passing, note the connection of pulling a man out of a pit with Joseph and Jeremiah, types of the Lord's resurrection (cp. Ps. 40:2). When a man is pulled out of the pit at baptism, he is sharing the experience of the resurrected Lord. And the Lord is naturally so urgent that men should share that experience which He suffered so much for.

14:6 *And they could not answer these things*- Rom. 8:31 may allude here; what shall we say to these things? Psychologically, being intellectually silenced is a shameful experience- unless one surrenders completely to the new argument. The response of the Jews for the most part was to get angry and to hate the Lord yet more. But the Lord wasn't out to just win an argument; He wanted to convert them. And He knew that by silencing them, He was leading them to a point where they would either convert totally, or hate Him unto death.

14:7 *And when he noted how they chose out the chief seats, he told a parable to those that were invited, saying to them*- The Lord was a guest, but He took the stage. Having silenced His hosts, He goes further,

attacking the mindset of His fellow guests as well as His hosts. This was not because He was an aggressive, victory-oriented person. He wanted their repentance, and in this case, He saw this might be achieved by going on the offensive, forcing them to a point where they must capitulate to Him, or go away in bitterness, self-condemned, having themselves made the answer. And this is His style to this day.

14:8 *When you are invited by anyone to a marriage feast, do not sit in the chief seat; lest a more honourable man than you be invited by him-* Elsewhere, the Lord had presented the invitation to His Kingdom as an invitation to the Messianic banquet. It ought to be obvious that we take the lowest seat in the light of such a gracious invitation. We sit there awed by the grace of being there in the ecclesia; all judgmentalism, superiority and criticism of others is so deeply inappropriate. We are to assume that the others are "more honourable". This is not a call to naivety, but rather to such a deep impression of our own experience of grace that we see others as better than ourselves. The Lord may mean us to assume that our response to His grace in calling us should instil in us an appropriate humility in secular life; as we take the lowest seat in the community of believers, so we take the lowest place in social life. The experience of grace is such that we are affected by it in every department of our secular and social lives. The chiefest in the Kingdom is the Lord Jesus; He is the "honourable" one, the same word translated "precious" about Him in 1 Pet. 2:4,6. The implication is that if we don't take the lowest seat, then we are taking the place which is the Lord's place. Any other choice apart from the deepest humility is an awful, Christ-surpassing pride, a taking of His place.

14:9 *And he that invited you shall come and say to you: Give this man your place. Then you shall be shamed into taking the lowest place-* The Lord teaches that if we're invited to a feast, we should take the lowest place, genuinely assuming the others present are more honourable than us; and we take our place at that table awaiting the coming of the host. Our attitudes to the seating and behaviour on entry to the feast will affect our eternal destiny- for when the Lord comes, He will make the arrogant man suffer "shame", which is a commonly used descriptor of the rejected at judgment day. The Lord goes on in that same discourse to explain what our attitude should be- He tells the parable of the great supper, to which those who were invited didn't pitch, and there was a desperate, last minute compelling of smelly street people to come in and eat the grand meal.

The shamed person who took the highest place is not thrown out of the feast; instead, he takes the lowest place. This could suggest that the judgment process is for our education. Those who were conceited and superior shall be eternally educated then. There may be a similar teaching

in the way that the labourers who worked longest and hardest 'learn' when the payment is given at the end of the day; but they retain their penny, their salvation. See on Mt. 20:11. There is therefore the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place- yet still within the family of God.

The public nature of the judgment experience is hinted at throughout the Lord's parables. The other guests at the Lord's table will see the man who took the highest place in the ecclesia taking now the lowest place- he has "shame" before their eyes, and likewise the believer who took the lowest place in this life will have praise for that humility from the other guests, as the Lord exalts him or her higher (Lk. 14:9,10). In this context the Lord proceeded to warn His followers not to be like the man who sets out to build a tower, but can't complete it- and therefore he has shame from those who behold it (Lk. 14:29). This is just another way of saying the same thing. There will be believers who grandly showed themselves to their brethren to be building something which actually they couldn't complete; and they will have shame before their brethren when the day of judgment reveals who they really are. All this, of course, has massive practical implications. If all will be ultimately revealed before our brethren in the last day, why try to act before them as someone we're not?

Yet on the other hand, the idea of the Lord Jesus returning and one of His guests having "shame" must surely refer, in line with other Biblical passages, to the shame of condemnation. 'And so therefore', the Lord continues, 'take that lowest place at the feast right now'. When the Lord spoke of how we must come down from our good seats at the feast and take the lowest seat, He's actually referring to condemned King Zedekiah, who likewise had to come down from his throne and take a lowly seat (Jer. 13:18). If the "lowest room" is seen as the place of the shame filled condemned... then surely He's saying that we should consider ourselves as "condemned" now as we sit at the feast. And what feast does the Lord have in mind? Is He perhaps referring on some level to the breaking of bread, which is the Lord's supper / feast where we now each take our place? Should we not, therefore, be sitting there feeling [although this is only part of the story] condemned, and the lowest of all? Is that not *one* [and only one, be it noted] of the emotions elicited in us by the cross? The "feast" of the breaking of bread is clearly meant to be understood by us as a foretaste of the Messianic "feast" of the future Kingdom. And if we

genuinely feel we should have the least place there, we will reflect that in our taking the lowest place at the memorial meeting. In our hearts, we will sit there knowing we ought to be condemned.

The man lying helpless on the Jerusalem - Jericho road was surely modelled on Zedekiah being overtaken there by his enemies (Jer. 39:5). When the Lord spoke of how we must come down from our good seats at the feast and take the lowest seat, He's actually again referring to Zedekiah, who likewise had to come down from his throne and take a lowly seat (Jer. 13:18). That weak, vacillating man basically loved God's word, he wanted to be obedient, but just couldn't bring himself to do it. And so he was, quite justly, condemned. It's as if the Lord saw in that wretched, pathetic man a type of all those He came to save. And even in this wretched position, the Lord will pick us up and carry us home. This gives a fine, fine insight into His sensitivity to us. Indeed, several times the Spirit in the NT uses OT pictures of unworthy believers as the basis of a description of the faithful. See on Lk. 10:33,34.

14:10 *But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place; that when he that has invited you comes, he may say to you: Friend, go up higher. Then shall you have glory in the presence of all that sit to eat with you-* The Lord clearly taught the continuity between the breaking of bread and the future marriage supper by observing that He would not again drink the cup until He drinks it anew with us at the marriage supper (Mt. 26:29). The parables of how the Gospel invites people as it were to a meal are suggesting that we should see the Kingdom as a meal, a supper, of which our memorial service is but a foretaste. We are commanded to enter the supper and take the lowest seat, strongly aware that others are present more honourable than ourselves. Those with this spirit are simply never going to dream of telling another guest 'Leave! Don't partake of the meal!'. But this is the spirit of those who are exclusive and who use the Lord's table as a weapon in their hands to wage their petty church wars. The very early church didn't behave like this, but instead sought to incarnate and continue the pattern of the meals of the Lord Jesus during His ministry. And this is one major reason why their unity drew such attention, and they grew. To exclude someone from the Lord's table is to judge them as excluded from the Kingdom banquet. And those who make such judgment will themselves be rejected from it.

We are come to "God the judge of all"- even now (Heb. 12:23). He is right now enthroned as judge of our lives (Mt. 5:34; Ps. 93:2). We are *now* in God's presence, and can't escape from it (Ps. 139:2); and the presence of God is judgment language (Acts 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2:19; Jude 24; Rev. 14:10). "God is the judge: he puts down one, and sets up another" in His mind (Ps. 75:7)- although the final putting down and setting up will be at the judgment seat (the basis for the parable of the man being asked to go up higher). This same parable is also rooted in

Prov. 25:7: "Put not forth yourself in *the presence* of the king, for better it is that it be said unto you, Come up hither: than that you should be put lower in *the presence* of the prince". We are in the King's presence both in this life- when we chose where to sit- just as much as when He returns and re-arranges the seating. The day of the Lord is coming, but it is even now (Mic. 7:4 Heb.). Before His presence, we shall feel "the lowest" of all. And that is how we are to feel in this life. This outlaws any sense of superiority towards our fellow guests, our brethren, in this life.

The parable about taking the lowest seat sounds obvious to us. If a poor nobody is invited to the King's feast, he would naturally take the lowest place, with feelings of wonderment, awe, embarrassment, joy, quiet honour, excitement that he'd been invited, that he was somewhere too good for him, by grace. The element of unreality in the story is that the man arrogantly takes a high place, and has to be demoted at the coming of the King. There's something unreal about this. But there's the rub. This is exactly how we are behaving when we jockey for status and 'power' in the ecclesia [in whatever form], when we fail to consider each man better than ourselves to be. This is how absurd we're being. The way the Lord applies this to His church implies that we should consider each of the other invited guests as "great men" of nobility. This is the level of respect which He intends there to be amongst us for our fellow brethren. The parables of judgment truly touch the very core of our spiritual being.

14:11 *For everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted-* See on Acts 5:31; 2 Cor. 11:7. So how, then, can we 'humble ourselves'? As noted on :9 and :10, we are to live now as if we are in the Lord's judgment presence, and all we seek is the lowest place in His Kingdom. When Israel was a child... she was humble, as we should be after our spiritual rebirth at baptism. It is evidently not something natural; for it is a fruit of the spirit we must develop. It isn't a natural timidity or nervousness or shyness. By realising our own sinfulness, we will realise our condemnation, and thereby be 'brought down'. For we are condemned for our behaviour, but saved out of that condemnation. The exact, vast debt is reckoned up- before we are forgiven (Mt. 18). We have been invited through the Gospel to sit down in the Kingdom. Humbling ourselves is therefore sitting down in the *lowest* place- not just a low place. Strictly, the Greek means 'the farthest' away from the Lord Jesus, who sits at the head of the table. Like Paul we must somehow get that deep and genuine apprehension that we are "chief of sinners"- and sit in the *lowest, farthest* place. This would mean that we 'each esteemed our brother better than ourselves to be', not in any naïve, meaningless way; not seeing strengths where they simply don't exist; but seeing him [or her] that way simply in comparison to our own lowness. Seeing others as higher than ourselves is a sure remedy for every case of

ecclesial friction and division. So often pride develops from a worry about what others will think of us, a desire to be seen as acceptable and not unusual. It leads to a hyper-sensitivity regarding what others may be implying about us. The humbled mind will not see things in these terms. *If only we would each, personally, learn this lesson, or at least grasp the truth and beauty and power of it.* The publican was so worried about his own position before God that he paid no attention, so we sense, to the hypocritical brother next to him: "The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner... this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for ... he that humbles himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:13-14). That sin-conscious man is an essay in self-humbling. This is why David sometimes parallels "the meek" and the repentant sinner (e.g. Ps. 25:8,9). See on Mt. 18:4.

14:12 *And he also said to him that had invited him: When you make a dinner or a supper, call not your friends, nor your brothers and sisters, nor your kinsmen, nor rich neighbours, unless they also invite you and repay you-* The Lord gave His parable about how *He* has invited us, through the call of the Gospel, to a great supper. Quite simply, the very experience and wonder of having been invited to the Kingdom should lead us to likewise invite others. But further. If we have truly understood the implications of the Lord's gracious calling, if we have truly perceived our desperation, we will take *the* lowest place, considering ourselves the *lowest* and least worthy. And we will therefore go out and invite others of the same class to which we perceive ourselves to belong- the poor, the maimed and blind.

Our attitude to others will be reflective of our perception of God's grace in calling us- as we were invited by such grace, so we will invite others to *our* table who likewise cannot recompense us. If we are the blind and maimed invited to the Lord's table, we will invite the blind and maimed to our table. The extent of God's grace to us really needs to sink in. When was the last time *you* did an act of pure grace to others like this...?

The Lord Jesus described those who responded to the Kingdom Gospel as entering into a marriage supper (Mk. 2:18,19; Lk. 14:12-24), which was a well-known figure for the future Messianic Kingdom (Is. 25:6-9). By eating / fellowshiping with Him in faith, His followers were in prospect enjoying the Kingdom life. To exclude people from His table is to seek to exclude people from His Kingdom.

14:13 *But when you make a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind-* There is a connection between Lk. 14:13 and 21. This is exactly

what the parable of :21 teaches that God does: "Bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind". The basis of God's calling of us must be the basis upon which we relate to others. We cannot recompense Him, yet He shows us His gracious invitation. So we too must share ourselves with those who cannot give us anything. In this sense, we like our Father, serve for nothing in the sense of no personal, concrete gain. We must *be* gracious by nature, and just *be* as He *is*.

The lame, blind etc. were not allowed to serve God under the law (Lev. 21:18), nor be offered as sacrifices (Dt. 15:21), nor come within the holy city (2 Sam. 5:6-8). The Lord purposefully healed multitudes of lame and blind (Mt. 15:30), and allowed them to come to Him in the temple (Mt. 21:14). His acted out message was clearly that those who were despised as unfit for God's service were now being welcomed by Him into that service. The lame and blind were despised because they couldn't work. They had to rely on the grace of others. Here again is a crucial teaching: those called are those who can't do the works, but depend upon grace. We need to appreciate too that in Palestine, to refuse an invitation to a feast was a major insult to the person who gave it. That the majority of people refused it would've been so hurtful to the host. And in this we see a picture of the pain of God, that the majority refuse His invitation. Therefore He is so happy when anyone *does* respond, even if they're down and out. And we should hold in our heart the tragedy of God, the pain of God, that so many have refused Him; and therefore never judge anyone as unsuitable who may respond to the invitation. We're making the invitations for *His* sake, not our own. And on this basis we 'bring in' those desperate types to the Lord's feast (:21). The same word is used about Barnabas 'bringing' the unlikely convert Paul to the apostles (Acts 9:27), and later 'bringing' or introducing him to the Antioch ecclesia (Acts 11:26), the "other sheep" being 'brought' into the fold (Jn. 10:16), the blind man whom people thought was no good for Jesus being 'brought' unto Him (Lk. 18:40), the Samaritan 'bringing' the good-as-dead wounded man to the inn / the ecclesia (Lk. 10:34), all reflecting how the goodness of God leads / brings [s.w.] desperate sinners to repentance (Rom. 2:4). In our 'bringing in' of desperate people to the Lord's feast, we are vehicles for that grace of God which 'brings in' men and women to Him. Notice in passing that we invite people to the Kingdom feast without seeking a recompense from them- i.e. we should not expect anything from them, be it personal loyalty, money, respect etc. And if we don't get it from them, only then will we be rewarded / recompensed for our preaching at the last day. So it should be no surprise to us if as with Paul our converts turn against us and in no form 'recompense' us for calling them. Actually we should take comfort from this, as it is an encouragement that we will have our recompense at the last day.

*14:14 And you shall be blessed; because they do not have anything to repay you with. For you shall be recompensed in the resurrection of the*

*just*- The 'blessing' is defined as recompense at the resurrection, and not necessarily in this life. This inevitably is to be connected with how the Lord went on to say that we are the poor, blind, lame etc. who have been invited to the feast (:21). The point being, that if we perceive our own desperation and inappropriacy to be called to the Kingdom feast, then we will likewise invite others who are perceived *by us* as the lowest of the low, and otherwise unsuitable for a king's banquet table. So we are to reflect God's calling of us, the desperate, the down and outs, in our calling of others. A person who feels they are somehow a nice guy and worthy of invitation will be the one who tends to consider others as unworthy of invitation to the Kingdom. He or she who perceives their own desperation will eagerly invite even those they consider to be in the very pits of human society.

The recompense will be in the form of the nature of our eternity. How we shall eternally be is a reflection of what we have done for others, especially in terms of how far we have accepted them.

14:15 *And when one of his dinner guests heard these things, he said to him: Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!*- We mustn't just like *the idea* of being in the Kingdom. We must seek it above all. The Lord told a parable about people invited to the Kingdom who all came up with different excuses as to why they couldn't come. This was in response to somebody remarking: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" - 'how great it would be to be in the Kingdom!'. And the Lord is replying 'Many of those given the real opportunity to be there actually don't want it that much at all. Don't just like the idea of being in my Kingdom, but make it the driving passion in your daily life, for which you'll sacrifice all'.

The Lord continues to turn the questions / comments back on themselves. A man comments how blessed will be the person to eat bread in the Kingdom of God; and Jesus responds by telling the parable about how in fact the majority of those who receive invitations to eat break in the Kingdom actually turn it down because of worldly distractions. Again the message is clear. 'Take your focus off the blessedness of *others* in the future Messianic Kingdom; but concern yourself with the very real possibility that you *yes you yourself* may actually turn down the invitation to be there because you're too caught up with the things of this world'. See on Lk. 14:25.

14:16 *But he said to him: A certain man made a great supper and he invited many-* "When you are invited by anyone to a marriage feast" (:13) is clearly meant to connect with "A certain man made a great supper, and he invited (s.w.) many". Evidently the idea of eating with the Lord at His table connects with the breaking of bread. Our attitude at that memorial supper is in essence our attitude at the greater supper of the last day. We sit there with our Lord and with our brethren. We will sit there at the last

day with the deep feeling, like the handicapped beggars had in the parable: "I should not be here. Who am *I*, me, me with all my weakness, doing *here*?". If we sit likewise at the breaking of bread with that spirit, we will not even consider grabbing the best seat for ourselves; nor would it cross our mind to say to someone else sitting there "Hey you, what are *you* doing here? If *you're* here, I'm gone! Don't you dare take that bread and wine, you're not in fellowship!". Yet this is precisely the attitude of those who exclude their brethren from participation at the Lord's table; for the breaking of bread is a foretaste of the feast to come, and the Lord is teaching that our attitude to our brethren at it is in fact going to be reflected in how He deals with us at the latter day marriage supper. It seems so many of our exclusivist brethren are voting themselves out of their place at the Kingdom; although I believe God's grace is such that He has a place even for them.

14:17 *And he sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were invited: Come. For everything is now ready-* See on Mt. 24:48. In the parable of the great supper, which is similar but not necessarily the same as that of the marriage feast, the servants going forth "at supper time" fits more naturally into the context of a preaching appeal just prior to the second coming than to the first century. The "supper", i.e. the Kingdom (Lk. 14:15; Mt. 22:2), is prepared, and at "supper time" - 'Kingdom time' - the appeal is made. "All things are now ready" (Lk. 14:17) explains the unmistakable sense of urgency in the commissions given to the servants to preach. This again indicates reference to an eleventh hour preaching campaign just prior to the second coming. The 'decorum of the symbol' suggests that the animals being killed for the meal would necessitate a brief period of invitation immediately prior to the feast, rather than them being on the table for 2,000 years. See on Mt. 24:14.

14:18 *And they all began to make similar excuses. The first said to him: I have bought a field and I need to go out and see it; I pray you excuse me-* See on Lk. 14:33.

There was a harder side to Christ. He was a demanding Lord. He told His disciples to forsake what they had and follow Him. They did. And apparently with no prefatory praise or introduction, He called them "you of little faith... fools... slow of heart to believe". Of course, He may have prefaced these criticisms with something softer (cp. His letters to the churches); but the Spirit has preferred not to record it. Often His parables warn that those who think He will understand their weakness, those who are too familiar with His softer side.

The parable of the great supper records men explaining to Christ why they can't *immediately* respond to Him, although they want to when it's more convenient: "I have bought a piece of ground, *and must needs* go and see it... I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them... I

have married a wife, therefore *I* cannot come" (Lk. 14:18-20). The implication is that they assumed that the servant calling them to the wedding (i.e. Christ) would understand that their excuses were quite reasonable; the man who pleaded marriage as his excuse would have been alluding to the Law's provision to have time off from the Lord's duties on account of marriage (Dt. 24:5). All these reasons were assumed to be quite reasonable, and the men sound as if they were confident that *of course* Christ would understand. The parable of the King's son records excuses which are more evidently unreasonable; some said they were going to work on their farm, when actually the banquet was going to be held in the evening (Mt. 22:5). There is a connection with the parable of Lk. 14, where the excuses seem more reasonable. But the similarity shows that as far as the Lord is concerned, *any* excuse, evidently irrelevant or apparently reasonable, is just not acceptable to Him. But the point of the parables is that as far as Christ is concerned, these were all just empty excuses, even the excuse that appeared to be based on a past concession to weakness. He's saying that the invitation to His Kingdom, to His very own wedding, must take priority over all the everyday things of human experience which we assume are so justified, and which we assume He will quite understand if we put in front of Him and His call. *Every reader* ought to feel uncomfortable on considering this. It's this category of Christian who will be so surprised when they are rejected: "Lord, Lord, open to us... When did we see you hungry...?" (Mt. 25:11,44). They thought they knew Him, but He has never known them (Mt. 7:23). This idea of surprise at rejection is to be connected with that of brethren thinking (mistakenly) that of course the Lord understands their putting His call into second place. He is a Lord they hardly know in this life, despite what they think, and He will be the same at judgment day. There's a point to be made from the way they are so confident they know Christ, but He says He has never known them. They didn't live up to the demanding Lord they served. The idea of a two-way relationship with Him was evidently foreign to them. They thought their theoretical knowledge and outward works meant that Christ knew them. The worrying thing is, how many of us feel we have a two-way relationship with the Lord?

That *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom (Mt. 25:5) is unusual- they must have been a pretty lazy, switched off bunch. And yet immediately we are led by the Lord to pass judgment upon ourselves- which is quite a feature of the parables, e.g. Mt. 21:31; Lk. 7:43 [as it is elsewhere- consider 2 Sam. 12:5; 14:8; 1 Kings 20:40]. Note how there is surely an element of unreality in the Lord's description of *all* those invited to the dinner refusing the invitation (Lk. 14:18,24). Would really *nobody* respond to such a gracious invitation? This was the obvious question that He begged in the minds of His hearers. The intention being that each hearer would reflect: "Is it I...?"... maybe at least *I* could respond to the call of the Gospel... The parable of the wedding

feast has an inappropriacy in that for 'merely' rejecting the invitation to the feast and beating the messengers, the King dispatches an army to attack them- whilst the meal is as it were hot on the table ready to be eaten (Mt. 22:3-7). The point is that every rejection of the invitation, every mockery of the preacher, elicits an amazing anger in God.

Christ's low expectations of us are clearly demonstrated when He told the parables of the wedding feasts. When you put them together, you get this picture: God made the wedding between Christ and us. The invited guests didn't bother coming, for very trivial, mundane reasons that they put in front of the honour of being invited to His wedding. Only tramps and beggars come to it, motivated selfishly by the thought of a free meal (cp. a penny for the day). But we, the bride, aren't ready (although Christ graciously doesn't mention that in the parable), and so He delays to come to the wedding. Back home, His most trusted household servants realize that He's delaying His return, and start to get drunk and beat each other. The excited young bridesmaids lose their enthusiasm and go to sleep. Eventually, the wedding happens, but some of the guests don't bother to turn up in a wedding garment, just in their filthy rags. The impression is clearly this: *the whole thing's a mess!* Yet this is the marriage of the Son of God to His dearly purchased bride, for whom He died, and lived a life of total self-control. Yet He *knew* the whole thing would be such a mess. See on Mt. 13:25.

"They all with one consent (s.w. 'agreement') began to make excuse" (s.w. 'reject') sounds like a conscious, national rejection of the message. The Jews will be judged by the word at the second coming (Jn. 12:48); but they were 'accused' (judgment seat language) by their rejection of God's word in the Old Testament during their lifetime (Jn. 5:45). The Jews in the parable "began to make excuse (saying)... I pray thee have me excused" (Lk. 14:18). The Greek word for "excuse" here is also translated "reject"- by excusing themselves from the requirements of God's word in this life, they were effectively rejecting themselves, as they will be at judgment. So as we read the word, we show our judgment. It could be that the reluctance of some to get down to reading the word is not simply because they lack time, but more subtly because they realize they are faced with God's judgments in it.

Israel had consented to be "bidden" to the feast; and according to Oriental practice, to accept an initial invitation to a feast was to commit oneself to respond to the final notice of it. But "they would not come", and yet despite this insult, their divine host had sent forth yet more servants to beg them to come. The Lord puts behind Him the insult of our rejections, and graciously pleads with us- even God pleading with men. The whole history of Israel is eloquent proof of this grace of God.

14:19 *And another said: I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to test them. I pray you, have me excused-* The invitation had been given ahead of time, and they had agreed to attend. Feasts were held in the evening, and oxen weren't tested in the evening; and they were tested *before* being bought and not afterwards. The excuses are presented as pathetic and not sincere.

14:20 *And another said: I have married a wife, and therefore, I cannot come-* Marriage gave freedom from conscription to the army, but not to turning down a call to attend a wedding feast which they had already agreed to attend. As noted on :19, all excuses for not responding to the Lord's call are here presented as pathetic and quite obviously fabricated.

14:21 *And the servant came and told his master these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant: Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and maimed and blind and lame-* The tragedy of the fact that the Jews by and large rejected the invitation of God meant that the servants are asked to "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes... and bring in [any who will respond]". The 'quickness' of the preachers is matched by the 'quickness' of the response of those who heard them in the first century. Now what this means is that if we as preachers have an urgency about our approach and our presentation of the message, then people will respond quickly. If we present the urgent good news as a set of academic propositions to be studied at length in the comfort of an untroubled conscience, then those who respond [if they do at all] will do so with the same laid back, cool, calculating attitude. Peter preached on Pentecost with a fire and passion which came from realizing the urgency of human need and Christ's salvation. And this is why, it seems to me, the people responded so quickly. They were baptized in a matter of hours after hearing the Gospel preached from his lips.

We in these last days are "the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind" who lay in the city streets (Lk. 14:21). Yet we are invited and led (the blind) or dragged / carried (the lame) into the great supper. For those who deeply meditated, the lame at the great man's table would have taken them back to lame Mephibosheth at David's table. His response to the invitation was to *bow*; think of a lame man bowing. How awkward it must have been, and how awkward he must have felt. "I'm a dead dog, from a family who cruelly hated you; why, why me?" was his response. And this ought to be ours. The awkward bow of that lame man, however embarrassing it was to watch for David in his glory, is a superb type of our attempts to respond to the inexplicable grace we have received from the Lord. He knows our weakness. Even though He taught plainly that 'the majority' (Gk; AV "many") of those He called would not be chosen, His parables often use percentages which imply that two thirds

(parable of the pounds) or half (parable of the virgins) *will* respond. This shows the love that hopes, in the face of the finest knowledge and foreknowledge of human nature which any man has ever had.

The usual excuse for not reading Scripture daily, or remembering the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread as He asked, or meeting with brethren and sisters etc. normally goes along these lines: 'I've nothing against these things. But after all, we're only human beings, Christ understands that, He knows we have to get on with the things of this life'. To which so many passages in the Gospels reply: 'Yes, the Lord does know exactly what everyday human life is all about; and He expects you, in these daily things, to make decisions which *consciously* sacrifice what you could get for yourselves in life'. And to which Paul replies: "The love of Christ constrains us". The servant goes out and invites people to the supper. They each make excuses which on a human level seem perfectly reasonable. One man was on his way to inspect some land he had just bought; another man was on his way (Gk.) to prove his new oxen; if they were no good, he had the right to get his money back. It seems, humanly, a bit unreasonable to go up to a person right in the middle of doing something important in daily life, and say 'Now stop that, come to a supper'. The third man assumed the Lord would understand why *he* couldn't respond: "I have married a wife, and therefore (of course, as you'll appreciate) I cannot come". After all, even the Law said that a man was free from military obligations after his marriage. But "the master" was "angry" with those men. What Moses' law conceded to men, the Lord Jesus wasn't necessarily ready to concede (and His attitude to divorce was similar).

In the invitation to the Kingdom, "the poor, and the maimed, and the halt and the blind" are invited; with the implication that Christ will be "recompensed at the resurrection of the just". We don't recompense Him now by our works; we are lost sheep causing Him needless work and worry, wasting His goods and needing to get ourselves out of the problem (Lk. 16:1), needing His frank forgiveness for our huge debts (Mt. 18:24). As Job recognized, if we are righteous, we give nothing to God (Job 35:7). Our *unrighteousness* commends God's righteousness (Rom. 3:5). All things come *out of* God: "Who hath first given to him?... for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things" (Rom. 11:35,36); it's give, give, give with God. We are the poor beggars sitting down at the great supper, unable to recompense. Of course, it depends where we put the emphasis. The parable which relates how Christ desires fruit from us is followed by that of the marriage supper, where it seems we are just asked to accept an invitation with humility (Mt. 21:34; 22:3). The point surely is that we are invited, for no reason, to the Kingdom, and we must accept with the humility that will accompany a recognition of such grace (Lk. 14:9). But

our experience of this grace will inevitably bring forth some spiritual fruit. Again, it seems we are intended to follow the story through, and visualize the inappropriate, uncultured conduct of these beggars at the table, causing so much unspoken embarrassment and pain to the generous rich man. The link with Is. 55:1-3 would suggest that we can interpret the call to the supper as the call of the Gospel, and the hungry people sitting down to a fine meal as our ecclesial experience now (although this isn't to say that we can't read it as concerning the future Kingdom too). The preceding Lk. 14:8-11 describe us as sitting down at the feast in this life, until the host walks in and starts re-arranging the seating order (cp. the coming of Christ in judgment on His household). We are left to imagine the grabbing for food, the greedy, selfish eyeing up of the plates, the grasping, the lack of social skills, the lack of good conversation between each other, the occasional cursing under the breath, perhaps even throwing of food, the eager desire for wine, the lack of restraint. All in the company of the Master (God) and His servants (Christ and the Angels). And this, it seems to me, was the Lord's imagination of His immature ecclesia, feasting on the good things He has prepared for us. Can we not begin to enter just a little into the pain and acute embarrassment and sadness we cause to our gracious Host by the self-centredness of our natures, manifest as it is in spiritual terms so often? It's quite possible to become so spiritually selfish, so bent on our own salvation, that the whole spirit of the supper is lost. After all, the idea of a large supper is to inculcate a social spirit rather than just to provide individual feeding to each of the guests. How many times has it been reasoned in these last days: 'Sorry, I have to work out my own salvation, I just can't spare time and can't risk association with my weaker brethren...'. And the Lord Jesus, in His perfect way, saw this coming as in sunny Galilee He formulated His parables of grace.

Time and again His parables sought to justify His association with outcasts (Lk. 14:15-24; 15:1-32; Mt. 18:23-25; 20:1-15; 21:28-32). When the nobleman came to ask Jesus to cure his son, Jesus agreed; and the man went home. But it was only on the way home that he really believed. He came to faith spontaneously, and not because Jesus insisted on it. Or remember the woman who had had five men in her life, and presumably a number of children to go with each of them. Her face and body would have reflected the story of her life. She was living with someone not her husband. Jesus didn't tell her to break up with the guy. He knew full well that if a woman left her man, she had nowhere to go. Here was a woman who had been 'married' five times. Who would want her? There were children involved. Probably even her family had rejected her. Jesus accepted the real life situation, and human failure to rise up to higher standards. One wonders whether the very lack of specific demand from Jesus maybe motivated her to somehow normalize her life. The gentle way Jesus treated these cases shows not so much approval, but an understanding of the frailty of human nature. And this is what enabled

Jesus to be so unwaveringly committed to His own perfect standards, and yet be so natural and at ease with the lowest of the low.

14:22 *And the servant said: Master, what you did command is done, and still there is room-* See on Lk. 14:12. The servant seems surprised that after the crippled and blind beggars have been drafted in to the opulence of the feast, "still there is room". Quite simply, there are more places in the feast of the Kingdom than there are people willing to fill them! How encouraging is that thought! The same Greek word for "place" recurs in Jn. 14:2,3, where the Lord Jesus taught that He was going to die on the cross in order to prepare a place for us in His Father's palatial mansion. The effort made in preparing the feast therefore speaks of Christ's life, death and resurrection for us. And it's so tragic that most people don't want to know. So in a sense, "all you gotta do is say yes". Just accept the invitation; take the messengers for real. Although perhaps we are left to read in the detail to the story, that many a desperate beggar just couldn't grasp that the messenger was for real, and preferred to stay put. Maybe only the *truly* desperate thought 'Maybe there's some truth in it... I've nothing to lose'. The many places in God's Kingdom... are only for those who desperately want them. Those who make meaningless excuses about how busy they are, those who can't believe that really God could be true to His word and really give us beggars a place in His wonderful Kingdom... will by their own decision not be there.

Let's not under-estimate the struggle which there is to believe the simple fact that there are more places in the Kingdom than people willing to fill them; that really God is begging us to come in to the place prepared for us through the death of His Son. When we read of the Master telling the servant to "*compel*" the beggars to come in to the feast, it's the same Greek word as we find used in one of the excuses given for not going in to the feast: "*I must needs go and see*" (the field the man had supposedly bought that evening without ever seeing it) (Lk. 14:18,23). Just as our loving God, with all the power of His most earnest desire, can seek to *compel* us to accept His offer, so the power of our own flesh *compels* us the other way. The petty human issues had become so large in the minds of the people concerned that they ended up telling obvious untruths or giving very poor excuses to get out of attending; life had gotten on top of them and that was it. The story seems so bizarre; the refusal of such a wonderful invitation would've been the element of unreality which struck the first hearers. The point is that petty human issues, coupled with our lack of appreciation that we are down and out beggars, really will lead people to lose out on eternity. The other such element of unreality would've been the persistence of the host to fill the places with anyone, literally *anyone*, willing to come on in. It's not so much a question of 'Will we be there?' but rather 'Do we really want to be there?'. Because if we do, we shall be.

The servant reports to the master that the invited guests wouldn't come to the supper [cp. God's Kingdom]. The master tells the slave to go out into the streets and invite the poor. And then we're hit with an incredible unreality, especially to first century ears: The servant has already done what the Lord had commanded him. No slave would take it upon himself to draw up the invitation list, or take the initiative to invite poor beggars into his master's supper. But *this* servant *did*! He not only had the unusual relationship with his master that allowed this huge exercise of his own initiative- but he somehow knew his master so well that he guessed in advance what the master would say, and he went and did it without being asked. In all this we have a wonderful insight into the relationship possible between us and our Lord, especially in the area of preaching / inviting people to His supper. The initiative is in our hands, and as we come to know Him better, we come to know His mind, and to sense how He would react. We have His aims and desires as ours, and we are in harmony with Him without having to be told things in so many words. And of course for a master to serve his servants was unheard of (Lk. 12:35-38). But this of course was the wonder of what the Lord did for us, "as one who serves" (Lk. 22:27), defining for us our attitude to each other at the memorial table and in all aspects of our lives and relationships. See on Lk. 13:7.

We can also understand the servant as the Lord Jesus, reporting to the master [= God] that the invited guests wouldn't come to the supper [cp. God's Kingdom]. This servant not only had the unusual relationship with His master that allowed this huge exercise of his own initiative- but He somehow knew His master so well that He guessed in advance what the master would say, and he went and did it without being asked. In all this we have a wonderful insight into the relationship between the Father and Son, especially in the area of inviting people to His supper [cp. salvation]. The point of all this is to demonstrate how the Lord Jesus has His influence upon the Father, and can at times change His stated purpose [e.g. with regard to the rejection of Israel- just as Moses did]. And this is the same Father and Son with whom we have to do, and whose matchless relationship is the basis and reason of our salvation.

14:23 *And the master said to the servant: Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come, that my house may be filled-* See on 1 Cor. 9:13. This shows the blessing which will go behind the efforts to spread the Gospel to all the world in the last days. There is a fervent, *urgent* desire of the Lord for this, and so His blessing will surely be with all who catch the same spirit of urgency. According to the parable, the quality of converts is sacrificed (by the Lord, not us) for the sake of numbers- which connects with the idea that the coming of Christ is to some degree dependent upon the full number of the Gentiles being converted (Rom. 11:25). Likewise the drag net was brought to land once it was full of fish (Mt. 13:48). The Lord speaks of how "few" (the Greek

implies physically weak, cp. the unwanted labourers in the market place) the labourers are (Mt. 9:37), and therefore more (numerically) are needed. Any lamentation about the weakness of the latter-day ecclesia must be seen in this context; the Lord is desperate for the places at the supper to be filled, although woe to those who come in without a wedding garment (Mt. 22:12).

The parable of the great supper chronicles the preaching of the Gospel over time. There were three stages of appeal: "To them that were bidden" (the Jews in Israel), to those in the streets and lanes of the city (the Jewish Diaspora), and finally, in a spirit of urgency, the preachers are commanded: "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Lk. 14:16-23; the same spirit of urgency in witness is to be found in the Lord's command to His preachers to cut the courtesy of prolonged greetings). Once the required number are in God's spiritual house, the feast will begin- and that feast represents eating bread in the Kingdom, at the second coming.

The language of 'going out' should be connected to the command to 'go and teach all nations'. The parable concerns the master of the house (God) commanding His servant (Christ); yet the connection with the preaching commission indicates that the commission given to Christ He fulfils through us, as demonstrated earlier in this study. The ever-increasing sense of urgency in the appeal to 'come in' ought to be reflected in our preaching in these last days.

Noah's ark is a well-known type of the salvation which humanity can find in Christ; and yet close analysis of the Genesis record reveals that there were some animals whom Noah had to bring into the ark and take them with him (Gen. 6:19; 7:2); and others who came to Noah and entered into the ark of their own volition (Gen. 6:20; 7:9,15,16). The same Hebrew is found in Gen. 8:9, about how the dove came to Noah of its own volition, and Noah welcomed her and took her into the ark. Putting all this together, we are to compel men to come in; and yet we are also to be there to welcome in the seekers who seek of their own volition. It's easier to do the latter; to put up a website, waiting there for some eager seeker to come and find. But we are also to compel people in, and to also bear in mind that there are some who will be attracted to the Gospel from selfish reasons, as the man who buys the field thinking that he can exploit it for his own benefit. These too we are to take on board and not turn away. Whilst people, with all their wonderful uniqueness, should never be pigeon-holed nor over-categorized... all the same, we need to consider the type of person we're dealing with as we plan out our approach. For if we seek them, we will consider who they are, and how appropriately we can engage them.

"Compel" is the same word used in :18, where the man excuses his lack of response to the Gospel by saying that he "must" or is compelled to go

and check out his new land. We are to help people see that the 'necessity' of secular things is to be replaced by the ultimate 'necessity' of responding to the call of the Kingdom.

The eagerness of the Lord to accept us, to find in us spiritual fruit, is perhaps reflected in the way that He begins inviting people of 'His' level to the feast of the Kingdom, but ends up lowering the bar as time goes on, to try by all means to get at least somebody in there. This theme of lowering the bar is perhaps continued in this same passage by the way the Lord says that His disciples must forsake / 'bid goodbye to' all that they had (Lk. 14:33). This is the same word found earlier in Lk. 9:61, where some time before, a potential disciple who first wished to go and "bid goodbye to" his family was judged as not suitably committed to the urgency of the task. But now, the Lord says that this is acceptable in His definition of discipleship. This Lord is our Lord.

"How shall they hear without a preacher?" It's impossible to hear without a preacher. Of course, God could beam the message into men some other way. But normally He chooses to work through human preachers. The preachers in the parable of the great supper are bidden "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled". The house of God's Kingdom is filled with people as a result of enthusiastic preaching.

*14:24 For I say to you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste my supper-* There may be the implication that the three people said "I cannot come" with the implication 'I can't come *right now*, but later'; and the Greek could bear such an interpretation. The master's comment at the end suggests that he knew these people would later turn up at the supper, but he would refuse them entry. There are often connections within the Lord's parables; in this case, the men who were so busy with daily life that they turned up at the wedding later would connect with the story of the other wedding guests who didn't have enough oil, and who *later* turned up at the wedding feast- again, only to be barred entry.

*14:25 Now there went with him great crowds; and he turned and said to them-* See on Lk. 7:9. The people eagerly following Jesus, and then He turns and tells them that actually God is coming after them with 20,000 men and they have only 10,000, and they on a personal level *urgently* therefore need to make peace with Him- because every minute now counts. Time and again, the Lord is urging people to look at themselves and their own position, not follow Him because they're part of a crowd who does, not hesitate from personal commitment because of never-never questions about cosmic ethics and Divine justice which are well beyond us... He forces the spotlight back on us, me myself and I, time and again. And His audience squirmed, just as they do today.

14:26 *If anyone comes to me, and hates not his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple-* The Lord himself spoke of how He expected this of us; and He put it in language which He surely *knew* would arrest attention. He's a demanding Lord- and reflection on His life and death for us shows that He has every right to be so. Notice how the Lord Jesus uses the figure of polysyndeton- i.e. repeating the word "and" when there's no grammatical need to, in order to build up the impression of how many different people we must be prepared to break with. His message is plain: the Lord Jesus must come in front of every human relationship, or else we are not His disciples. And it isn't just human relationships that must be sacrificed; it's "houses... lands" (careers, cars, we might say) as well (Mt. 19:29). It has to be seriously asked whether our community, especially the younger generation, are prepared to be the Lord's disciples; whether they have given up these kind of things for His sake. He must be the *Lord* of our lives, the master passion and controller. Christ's love *constrains* us. *These* sorts of demanding words are so common in the Gospels that they almost slip our notice. There can be no serious doubt what He's saying: He has no room for passengers or part-timers. As far as He is concerned, it can't be a hobby.

14:27 *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple-* The Lord taught that unless a man was willing to carry his cross and forsake all that he had, he couldn't be His disciple. And He called them His disciples, even though they clearly didn't perceive the real nature of the cross, nor did they actually leave all that they had but retained some things. The disciples were told to sell what they had (Lk. 12:22,32,33); but it seems they kept their fishing business. After having asked them this, the Lord again had to speak to them about forsaking all that they had (:33). Their claim to have left literally all (Lk. 18:28) appears somewhat exaggerated. Indeed, the parable of the unjust steward being specifically directed at the disciples (Lk. 15:1 cp. 16:1,9), it could appear that they had a special problem with lower-middle-class petty materialism (Lk. 16:9). Likewise Lk. 6 is spoken specially to the disciples, and it has much to say about materialism. The Lord was and is very generous to our weak efforts to rise up to His high standards.

Reflect on a Gospel parallel to see the huge importance of being a disciple of Jesus. In Mt. 10:38 the Lord says that whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow after Him, "is not worthy of me". In Lk. 14:27 we have the same words, but concluded with "... the same cannot be my disciple". To be a disciple of the Lord is to be worthy of Him. To seek to walk as He walked, to follow behind Him, is to be worthy of Him. The important thing is to follow, for all our stumblings, but at least to be in the way behind Him.

Of course we cannot literally take up the Lord's cross. Taking up the cross must therefore refer to an attitude of mind; it is paralleled with forsaking all that we have (Lk. 14:27,33), which is surely a command to be obeyed in our attitudes.

14:28 *For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he have enough to complete it?*- Virtually nobody in the audience had ever planned to build a tower (Gk. 'castle'). So the Lord means 'If you were mega wealthy and had money to build a tower, wouldn't you even then be careful to understand the total cost in advance, lest even your wealth is all taken away by it?'. They were asked to imagine they were wealthy. The Lord was seeking to elevate their minds upwards to consider the great potential which they had. But all the same, they must count the cost; and realize that to build a castle / tower was beyond them. This is the implication of :31 and :33. Capitulation is required. Or it could be that the Lord is asking them as poor people to seriously calculate how much it would cost to build a tower / castle, and realize it was beyond them. Recognizing our spiritual bankruptcy, our inability to pay, and throwing ourselves upon the Lord- this is the same as forsaking all we have (:33).

14:29 *Unless, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish it, all that watch begin to mock him, saying-* See on Rev. 16:15. The only true foundation laid is the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 3:11). The potential builder must resign all plans for self-salvation, all efforts to lay his own foundation; and accept that of the Lord Jesus. Luke likes to use the Greek word for "finish" in relation to how all things were finished in the work of the Lord Jesus (12:50; 18:31; 22:37).

14:30 *This man began to build, and was not able to finish-* Earlier, the Lord had spoken of the shame of rejection at judgment day (:9). It would be witnessed publicly; the shame of the unworthy will be before the eyes of all their brethren (Rev. 16:15). If the tower / castle had to be built, then the man would have to urgently and desperately find a mega wealthy person who could enable him to do the job. And that person was the Father offering the wealth of grace in His Son.

14:31 *Or what king, as he goes to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel, whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that comes against him with twenty thousand?*- All the parables contain elements of unreality in order to make a point. This one speaks of a King coming in judgment upon another King who only has half the army which he has. The more powerful King is of course God. But we are likened to a "king" also, on His level in that sense, who has only half His strength. This is altogether such an under estimate of the Father's physical and moral superiority to us! The smaller army can of course

defeat the bigger army- but only with God's help, as various Old Testament examples make clear. The king must resign all attempts to win the battle in his own strength. "By good advice make war (Heb. 'a battle')" (Prov. 20:18); and the advice is to not even attempt it. The weaker king has it seems already embarked on journeying to the encounter; he has to display great humility in avoiding it by recognizing that he really hasn't got the strength to succeed.

14:32 *Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an ambassador and asks conditions of peace-* See on Rom. 14:19. Does the man with 10,000 men faced with the oncoming army of God with 20,000 men just recklessly go ahead, or does he seek reconciliation? There was surely an intended connection within the Lord's teaching concerning how the loving Father saw the prodigal son "afar off" in his sin and separation; and how the King [God] coming against man with 20,000 men in battle needs to be reconciled with whilst He is still "afar off" (Lk. 14:32; 15:20). God is both coming towards us in judgment; and yet also sees us 'from afar' in untold grace and desire to save. It is this wondrous paradox which makes the ultimate meeting of God and man so intense and wonderful. The 'harder side of God', the King coming in overpowering judgment against sinful man, is what gives power and poignancy to His final meeting with man as the Father meets the prodigal. See on Lk. 10:34.

14:33 *So therefore whoever of you does not renounce all that he has, cannot be my disciple-* See on Lk. 12:22; 14:23; 21:3. The weak king who sends ambassadors asking for conditions of peace is understood by the Lord as the man who forsakes all he has in order for peace with God. This is the importance of forsaking wealth (Lk. 14:33), as the merchant did (Mt. 13:44-46), as the blind man left his garment (Mk. 10:50), as the widow threw in her two mites, rejecting the temptation to be 'prudent' and keep one for herself to use as capital for the future (Lk. 21:2), as Matthew "left all, rose up and followed" (Lk. 5:28), and as the disciples in that beautiful childlike innocence could say "Lo, we have left all...?" (Mk. 10:28). What this surely means is that in our *attitudes* we must be as if we possessed nothing, as if we have in our heart of hearts resigned everything, even the very concept of personal 'possession'. See on 2 Cor. 6:10.

When the Lord speaks of leaving all and following after Him, He surely had in mind the well-known story of Mattathias, who began the Maccabean revolt by saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the Law and supports the covenant *follow after me... and they left their possessions behind* in the town" (1 Macc. 2:27). And again the Lord seems to have had this in mind when He says that when He comes, His true people are to flee Jerusalem and not worry that their 'stuff' is in the

house' (Lk. 17:31). For an itinerant teacher like Jesus of Nazareth to offer his ideas and his interpretation of the Old Testament, and then have men following Him, was not out of place in first century Palestine. But the Lord twists the whole figure of 'follow me'. Unlike the other teachers, his teaching didn't lead to taking arms and fighting Rome. His men are to follow Him in wilfully taking up and carrying a cross, imitating His supreme human bravery in both His life and above all in His death, a bravery which He showed in facing sin in the eye and conquering every temptation, whatever the cost, whatever the human implication.

The Lord followed right on from the supper parable with the demand to hate one's own life, pick up their cross and follow Him, without which we cannot be His disciple. He also told the parable of God coming with a huge army to meet us who are far weaker- and our need to make peace with Him and forsake all that we have in order to follow Christ (Lk. 14:25-33). These radical demands of Jesus are in fact a development of His parable about the supper. For amongst some Middle Eastern peoples to this day, refusing the invitation to enter the banquet for such a meal- especially after having signalled your earlier acceptance of the invitation- was "equivalent to a declaration of war". And so the parable of *us* as the man going out to war against a far superior army suddenly falls into place in this context. "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that doesn't renounce all that he has, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33). The renouncing or forsaking of all we have refers to the man with 10,000 soldiers renouncing what human strength he had in the face of realizing he was advancing against a force of 20,000. The picking up of the cross, the 'hating' of our own lives, the renouncing all we have... obviously refers to doing something very hard for us. But the context is the parable of the supper, where the 'hard' thing to understand is why people refused the invitation, why they just couldn't believe it was real and for them; or why they just let petty human issues become so large in their minds that they just couldn't be bothered with it. Simply believing that we will be there, that in all sober reality we have been invited to a place in the Kingdom, that God is compelling / persuading / pressurizing us to be there... this is the hard thing. This is the hating of our lives, picking up our cross, forsaking our human strength and surrendering to God.

"Whoever of you does not *renounce* all that he has cannot be my disciple". Renouncing is something we do in our hearts and deepest feelings and attitudes. Have we truly *renounced* it all? Even if there are still bank balances and pension plans and property deeds and cars and treasured possessions... made out in our name. Have we in our hearts *renounced* them? That they aren't *really* mine. I have no personal long term security from them, because they're *not mine*. I'm just holding in stewardship what God gave me. And the Lord Himself drives the point home- if we have any *other* attitude to these wretched things, these

*almost*-nooses around our necks, then we are *not* His disciples. It's one of the scariest thoughts for Christianity. The fearless, gripped-by-Jesus approach to life which we see in the early church is the very opposite of the passivity of our post-modern world. We are called to a passionate, emotional life; a life where we each have someone to save, someone to die for, to live for, to sacrifice our self for. And this approach to life will naturally take care of how we use 'our' money. It is the passion-less life which results in a mean, careful approach to the spending of 'our' resources for others. See on Acts 4:32.

The Lord appears to make discipleship dependent upon giving up our possessions and forsaking all we have. But it's quite apparent that His disciples didn't literally do that. Zacchaeus only gave away half of his possessions (Lk. 19:8); and other disciples of Jesus clearly retained their homes and some possessions. The Lord must therefore mean that He expects us to *in our minds* resign all personal ownership of absolutely everything which we have- even if those things remain, to human appearance, 'ours'. This is really a challenging thing, in this world of savings and acquisition.

14:34 *Salt therefore is good, but if the salt has lost its taste, with what shall it be seasoned?*- The Greek for "lost its taste" is literally 'to become foolish', and is so translated in Rom. 1:22. Salt is good unless it is not salty, when it is then useless; this means that salt has a very specific usage, and beyond that it cannot be used for anything. It can only be cast away as are the condemned (:35). The idea is that unless we achieve our Divinely intended role as the salt of the earth, then we are useless and will be condemned; we have no other possible usage in this world apart from that intended by God. The "therefore" connects with :33 about being a disciple, which involves leaving all as the disciples did and following the Lord (:33,27). The disciples followed the Lord in the sense of supporting and performing His missionary work. They were the "salt of the earth / land". Without them, "it", the land, would not be salted, as so much depended upon them; or the idea may be that if the disciples lost their saltiness, they could not be re-salted. If they turned away from their ministry, this would be a serious sin and they could not then be re-appointed to it (Heb. 6:5,6). If we are no influence upon the earth around us, then we have failed in our calling to be the salt of the earth, and will be condemned. We cannot be secret believers.

"Good" has the idea is of being able, to have possibility. If we will not use our potential for good, then we will be rejected, because we have no possibilities for use. It's only when we wilfully lose our potential for good that we really are of no use. If salt loses savour, what then can be used for seasoning ["wherewith shall it be salted"]? The idea is surely that if

salt cannot be used for making salty- then it can be used for nothing, it has no practical use. This is a major statement about the ultimate vanity of all secular achievement and careers, compared to being the salt of the earth.

14:35 *It is useful neither for the soil nor for the manure heap, it is thrown away. He that has ears to hear, let him hear-* The fact there is no middle road is the most powerful imperative to total devotion. The Lord foresaw that it would be possible for His men to be as salt which had lost it's savour; to appear as His, but for this to have no practical effect at all; and such salt is to be "cast out" in the end. We *must* have influence upon others, or we aren't salt. Salt could be used for nothing apart from savouring things. We must fulfil our ministry, for otherwise we are of no practical use and will be "thrown away" in condemnation (Mt. 3:10; 5:30; 13:48; Jn. 15:6 etc.).

## CHAPTER 15

15:1 *Now all the tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to him to hear him teach-* Unlike many preachers of high spiritual standards, the Lord was attractive to sinners. They flocked to hear Him, He ate with them and appeared to actually quite like their company. 'Drawing near' is a Hebraism for coming to a holy place for worship. The Lord in His very person was the holy place, and not the Jerusalem temple cult. The double mention of "him" indicating the spiritual charisma which the Lord holds over those desperately seeking righteousness

15:2 *And both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying: This man receives sinners and eats with them-* The Lord was criticized for "receiving sinners" and eating with them. Instead of the usual and expected Greek word *dechomai*, we find here the Greek *prosdechomai*- He welcomed them *into fellowship*, symbolizing this by eating with them. This was an act which had religious overtones in first century Palestine. Notice that *prosdechomai* is used by Paul to describe welcoming a brother / sister in spiritual fellowship (Rom. 16:2; Phil. 2:29). The Lord fellowshiped people in the belief that this would lead them to repentance, following His Father's pattern of using grace in order to lead people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). He didn't wait for people to get everything right and repented of and *only then* fellowshiped them, as a sign that they were up to His standards.

The theme of eating continues after Luke 14- for Luke 15 contains parables told by the Lord in answer to the criticism that He ate with sinners (Lk. 15:2). He explained that He had come to seek and save the lost, and that was why He ate with them (Lk. 15:4 cp. Lk. 19:10, where He justifies eating with Zacchaeus for the same reason). Note how in the case of Zacchaeus, the man only stated his repentance after he had 'received' Jesus into his house and eaten with Him. This exemplifies how the Lord turned upside down the table practice of the Jews- He didn't eat with people *once they had* repented, but *so that* His gracious fellowship of them might *lead them to* repentance. The parables of Lk. 15 speak about eating in order to express joy that a person had repented and been saved- the eating was to celebrate finding the lost sheep, coin and son. But the Lord was saying that this justified His eating with not yet repentant sinners. Thinking this through, we find an insight into the hopefulness of Jesus for human repentance- He fellowshiped with them and treated them *as if* He were celebrating their repentance; for He saw eating with them in this life as a foretaste of His eating with them in His future Kingdom. He invited them to a foretaste of the future banquet. His fellowship policy was therefore to encourage repentance; and seeing He wished all to be saved, He didn't exclude any from His table.

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The parables of the lost coin and lost sheep invite the hearer to identify with the heart of the God who seeks His lost. But the final climax of this triad of parables is that of the lost sons. Here the audience has to place themselves in one of two camps- the self-righteous son who ends up not eating with the Father, or the prodigal who sins so awfully and then eats with the Father in the hushed humility which experience of His grace along can bring. The Jews were worried about whom they might eat / fellowship with, just as many in the body of Christ are today. But the Lord turned it all around- *you* are a serious sinner, you need to make that long walk home to the Father in your day by day repentance, and eat with Him by His grace. He is seeking *you* to eat with Him; the question of whom *you* eat with is utterly secondary to that.

15:3 *And he spoke to them this parable, saying-* This rubric is not used to introduce the parables of the lost coin and lost son which follow. It could be that the Lord intended us to consider the three parables as one.

15:4 *What man of you-* Although the parables have the appearance of simple stories, their essential meaning is only granted to the reflective and spiritually minded reader. Close analysis of the parables reveal that they often contain something in them that is arrestingly unreal; and in this is very often the crux of the message. Surface level reading and listening give the impression that they are simple, homely stories, obvious in their meaning. But they are not; otherwise all men would have understood them, and the Lord would not have spoken them *so that* Israel would hear but not perceive. The true meaning depends upon perceiving that there is an element of startling unreality within the story line, that flags attention to the real message. The parables therefore challenge our stereotypes and force us to re-examine cherished suppositions. Perhaps the most obvious signpost to this feature of elements of unreality in the parables is in that of the lost sheep: "What man of you..." would leave ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness and go searching for the one lost one? Answer: none of you would do that. And perhaps likewise, "What woman..." having lost just one piece of silver would be so obsessive about finding it, and so ecstatic with joy upon finding it (Lk. 15:4,8)? Perhaps the answer is also meant to be: "Not one of you". Yet this is the Father's passion for saving the lost, and rejoicing over them

*Having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them, does not leave the other ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost, until he finds it?*- The Lord's parable of the good shepherd (Lk. 15:1-7) brings together Ps. 23 and also the restoration passages of Jer. 23:1-8 and Ez. 34:1-31, which speak of the flock of Israel going astray due to bad shepherds, being saved by the good shepherd, being delivered / gathered, and then returning to the land. The sheep is found, and accepts being found- there is no actual mention of repentance. Thus the 'return' of Judah to their land was intended as a work of God- He would make them return, He would give them repentance [note how Acts 11:18 speaks of God granting men repentance]. This is all such wonderful grace. The even more incredible thing, though, is that Judah refused to accept this grace; they didn't 'return' to the land because they saw no need to 'return' to God. They willingly forgot that they were only in Babylon because of their sins; to 'return' to the land was a 'return' to God, which He had enabled. But they were like the lost sheep refusing to sit on the shepherd's shoulders, preferring to sit in a hole and die... and this is the warning to us. For truly, absolutely all things have been prepared for us to enter the Kingdom. It's only those who don't want to be there who won't be.

The good shepherd searches for the sheep until He finds it. John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which describes God's people as perishing on the mountains, eaten by wolves. But the Lord Jesus set Himself to do that which was impossible- to search *until He found*, even though He knew that some were already lost. Our attitude to those lost from the ecclesia and to those yet out in the world must be similar. The Lord knew there would not be repentance by Israel. But He went to the fig tree seeking fruit, even though it wasn't the time for fruit (Mk. 11:13). He saw the crowds who wanted only loaves and fishes as a great harvest (Mt. 9:37). More than anything, preaching has taught me the immense value of the human person as an individual. The Lord's parable of the strange shepherd who leaves the 99 and gives his all for the one- the foolish one, the lost one, the antisocial one- is programmatic for me. The need is the call. If one person needs fellowship, forgiveness, love, the teaching of the Gospel, baptism, encouragement, re-fellowship, support, money, whatever... the value of them as an individual must be paramount. No matter what it costs us, how far we have to travel [in whatever sense], how much 'trouble' we get into, how foolish we look, how out on a limb we put ourselves. The value and meaning of the individual person was paramount in the Lord's teaching and example, and it must be in our worldviews too.

David leaving the sheep and going to fight Goliath recalls the parable of the Lord as the good shepherd leaving the flock and going to save the lost sheep. The shepherd goes alone at night up into the hills (cp. Isaac going to be sacrificed in the hills), and carries the lamb on his shoulder- as the

Lord carried the cross of our sins on his shoulder to redeem the lost sheep of mankind (Is. 53:6). This lost sheep parable is also picked up in 1 Peter 2:25: "For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the shepherd and bishop of your souls" (i.e. Christ the shepherd). But this in turn is quoting Is. 53:5,6: "All we like sheep have gone astray... but he was wounded (on the cross) for our transgressions", which is thus the parallel to the saving of the lost sheep. This interpretation of the lost sheep parable- i.e. that the shepherd going to save the sheep represents the Lord going to die on the cross- was first prompted by David leaving the sheep with the keeper to go and fight Goliath, representing Christ's saving us from sin on the cross. The leaving of the sheep with the keeper perhaps looks forward to the Lord's entrusting the disciples to the Father's care in those agonizing days while death parted him from them, as David's encounter with Goliath did. David's subsequent leaving of them altogether to go and live in the King's court clearly looks forward to our Lord's ascension to Heaven after His victory over the real Goliath.

15:5 *And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing-* At the time of Jesus, it was taught (*Mishnah Qidd 4.14*) that "A man should not teach his son to be a herdsman...for their craft is the craft of robbers". Shepherds weren't seen as kindly old men. They were seen as crafty and thieves. But the Lord chose that figure to represent Himself and the Father- even though the Old Testament likens God to the shepherd of Israel. The startling, unsettling figure [for the first century Jewish mind] was to demonstrate how it is the Lord's humanity that makes Him our saviour. Likewise, the likening of the Gospel to yeast would have been shocking; or to a mustard bush, which is a member of the cabbage family [rather, e.g., than to a fruitful vine or upright palm tree]. It is signalled to us that there is to be a strangeness to this new Kingdom about which Jesus spoke, a humanity and yet unusualness about it. It was hard for the Lord to explain to us the level of love for us which He would reach in the cross. So He told a story of a shepherd who so madly loves his sheep, whose life is so taken up by his job, that he would die to save one of them, and comes back triumphantly rejoicing when he has found the lost sheep. The average shepherd would have surely accepted that some sheep are lost, it's the luck of the game. But this shepherd who dropped all and ran off after one lost sheep was no usual shepherd. And the element of unreality in the story brings out the Lord's grace towards us. Note in passing how the man : sheep relationship portrays that between us and the Lord. As the sheep understood pathetically little about the shepherd's sacrifice to save it, so we too fail to appreciate the height of the fact that Christ died for us, as the shepherd for the sheep. We can be sure that the frightened sheep didn't bob along on the shepherd's shoulders, grinning all the way home. With his underside covered in faeces and mud, it would have struggled with the Saviour shepherd, fanatic almost in his passion to save the sheep. As he stumbled along the rocky paths, shoulders bowed down, hands against his chest clutching the

animal's paws, the shepherd would be the living imitation of the posture of the Lord as He carried the cross of our sins to Calvary. All this is a pattern of the almost fanatic effort we should expend to win back the lost.

The man who owned 100 sheep was rich. Shepherds were the lowest of the low. If you owned 100 sheep, you employed a shepherd to look after them and take responsibility for chasing the lost. But there's something unreal- the owner of the sheep is the one who is the shepherd. This actually is the point of the Ezekiel 34 passage upon which the Lord built the parable- having fired the unworthy shepherds of Israel, "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, *I myself, even I*, will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will deliver them ... I will bring them ... I will feed them ... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep" (Ez. 34:11-15). The remarkable thing is that the owner of the sheep decides to become the personal shepherd, feeding, seeking, delivering, bringing the sheep *himself personally*. A Palestinian wealthy enough to own a whole flock of sheep simply wouldn't do this. He *always* hired someone else to do this- because being a shepherd was so despised. Behold the humility of God. But see too His personal passion for us. Hence the Lord's question: Which one of *you* would act like this? The Father and His Son take such passionate personal responsibility for us, that God was willing in Christ to shame and humiliate Himself in order to get us back into the fold.

### **Personal Responsibility**

There's also something odd about the way the Lord speaks of the shepherd: "*He* has lost one of them". Translations of the Bible into Semitic languages, especially Arabic, tend to read: "If one of them is lost" (passive). In the language and concepts of the Middle East, a speaker never blames himself. As in Spanish, they would not say "I lost my book"- rather, "the book went from me". Likewise "I missed the train" is expressed as "the train left me". And I would even speculate that preaching Christ in Arabic and even Hispanic cultures comes up against the problem of people strongly disliking taking ultimate responsibility, or to own up to the personal guilt of sin; the shifting of blame away from oneself is reflected even in their languages. And so when the Lord puts words in the shepherd's mouth whereby he takes direct responsibility for the loss of the sheep, this would've sounded strange even grammatically. Apparently to this day, it's hard to translate that actual phrase into Arabic. Likewise with the idea of the woman saying that she had found the coin which she had lost. The Lord is labouring how God, and God in Christ, feel an extraordinary personal responsibility for the lost.

15:6 *And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them: Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep*

*which was lost!*- The shepherd-owner calls his "friends" together. This surely refers to the clubs the Pharisees formed in villages, called the *Khaburim* ['friends']. They ought to have rejoiced to be eating with sinners, as the Lord was- but they wouldn't. The whole context of the three parables is the Lord justifying why he ate at home with sinners, thereby showing that He considered them as somehow 'in fellowship' with Him. The Pharisees wouldn't do this unless those people repented and learnt Torah in great depth. But the Lord is surely saying that He sees those men who ate with Him as the sheep which has already been brought home. He reflected the gracious outlook with which He saw people; and His hopefulness that by treating a person as if they had 'come home', then they would indeed do so. Probing this line further, the Lord Jesus speaks of the found sheep as being symbolic of the repentant. But the sheep did nothing- it was simply acceptant of having been found. To accept being found is, therefore, seen by the Lord as what He calls 'repentance'. Now surely that's grace- salvation without works.

The element of unreality is seen in the way the shepherd takes the sheep *home* and not back to the fold, inviting neighbours around to rejoice that his sheep had been found. The quite unusual joy and humanly inappropriate love of the shepherd for that sheep is of course there to signpost to us the "love beyond all reason" of the true shepherd for us. The way the lost sheep is brought home rather than returned to the fold was also perhaps some sort of allusion to the teaching of Dt. 22:1 that the lost sheep of your brother's must be returned to *him*. This would mean that our pastoral care should not simply be for our 'own' sheep, those for whom we have responsibility; but for the lost sheep of other 'pastors' who've not done their job. See on Jn. 10:12.

There is an element of unreality in the story of the lost sheep. And that unreality reflects the sensitivity of Jesus. The shepherd doesn't return the sheep to the fold, but takes it home and calls his friends around to see the dumb animal and rejoice (Lk. 15:4-6). The Lord knew we would frown a bit at this. He foresaw how hard it would be for us to rejoice in the return of a difficult sheep to fellowship.

This parable was told by the Lord to justify His eating with sinners. He justifies it by saying that He is holding a party over the finding of one lost person; and those sinners are His friends and neighbours. Truly He is the sinner's friend.

To carry a sheep on your shoulders, fighting and struggling with you, as you climb down a mountainside in the dark... isn't something which is usually done *rejoicing*. But this is the unusual, humanly inexplicable, *joy* which there is in the Father and Son when day by day they 'find' us and bring us back. And where would a shepherd usually take such a lost animal? Back to the flock, whom he's left in the wilderness. But then comes another unreal element. The shepherd takes the sheep *home to his*

*very own house*. This sheep had such extraordinary value to this wealthy man. He came back dirty and exhausted- he humiliated himself and made himself a fool in the eyes of the world, all because of this humanly senseless love and joy which he had over this lost sheep. And we have to fill in the details, answering the unasked but implied questions- what about the 99 left out in the wilderness? The story ends with them out of the house- paving the way for how the elder son is left standing outside of the house. Note how Lk. 15:3 speaks of the three parables as one, in the singular, "parable".

In respect of God's relationship with the Angels, it is interesting to note that there seems to be a theme in Scripture of all of the Angels being involved in each action one of them performs, due to the perfect unity that exists between them and God (see on Lk. 11:7,8; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Ex. 12:41). Thus when one of the Angels acts in our lives, all the others are conscious of it too. Consider how Luke 15 describes the joy in Heaven when one sinner repents; the man who found the lost sheep "calls together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me... when she (the woman) has found it (the lost coin) she calls her friends and neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me... likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repents". The man and the woman must therefore represent God manifested through our guardian Angel. The Angel physically leaves the presence of God in Heaven and then goes off to arrange circumstances to encourage the sinner to return. He then calls all the others together to rejoice "when He comes home" (into Heaven, into the multitude around the throne of God from which Angels go and return in obeying God's Word). The whole Heavenly household then rejoice together. Thus we read in Hebrews 1:14 that *all* the Angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation". *All* the Angels are involved together in this work. All things in Heaven (the Angels) and on earth (the things they arrange on earth) are for our sakes!

15:7 *I say to you, that even so there shall be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, than over ninety nine righteous persons, who need no repentance*- There can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus spoke the words of God, and therefore His sayings can be interpreted at the deepest possible level; and yet at the same time, they were so easy to understand by simple, sincere hearts. The sayings of Jesus have been translated back into Aramaic, the language of His day, by C.F. Burney. He was struck by the degree to which they had a rhythmic shape, like many of the prophetic sayings of the Old Testament. Thus a passage like Lk. 7:22 has six two-beat lines followed at the end by a three-beat line; the commission to the disciples in Mt. 10:8 rhymes, both in Aramaic and in Greek. The Lord's prayer is expressed in two-beat lines. The crunch point of the Lord's forgiveness parable in Lk. 15:7, that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, uses the device of alliteration, i.e. similarly

sounding words. He uses three words which feature the guttural 'h': joy = *hedwa*; one = *hada*; sinner = *hateya*. In passing, I find this kind of thing evidence that we do have in the Gospel records the actual words of Jesus, and not a rough summary of them interpreted by many others, as modern theologians wrongly suppose. Our view of inspiration enables us to return as it were to the actual, living voice of Jesus in confidence. If the record of His words is sure and true, then we can go on to guess in what tone of voice He would have spoken, and seek to define in our own minds ever more features of the Son of Man. This thought alone I find so immensely inspiring- for we hear the real Christ speaking to us down the centuries. The Lord's teaching style thus reflected His recognition that He was speaking to the illiterate, and that many of those who followed Him would need to commit His words to memory; and so He spoke His words in a form which was memorable by them, as well as profitably dissectible by computer-aided intellectuals of our age. In this alone is a marvellous insight into both His genius and also His sensitivity to His audiences, from which we can take a lesson. But on a practical level, it is apparent that He had carefully prepared His sayings in advance, perhaps during His years up to age 30. I don't see His sayings as off the cuff bursts of wisdom, neither words merely flashed into His mouth by the Father. They were God's words, but carefully prepared by Him. He sets a matchless example to any would-be teacher in His church. Jesus spoke to the hearts of the people. He didn't use words like 'sin' very often. He uses *hamartia* ['sin'] in the Synoptics only 8 times, compared to 64 times in Paul's writings. Jesus wasn't talking theology, He didn't speak in abstract terms. Rather did He speak of evil fruit, lost sheep, lost coins, no good sons... because He was framing His message for the illiterate, who thought in images rather than abstractions.

15:8 *Or what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she loses one piece, does not light a lamp and sweeps the house and seeks diligently until she finds it?*- Luke 15 contains two parables concerning repentance, where the restored sinner is in fact not repentant: the lost sheep and the lost coin. The Lord searches for them *until* He finds them; neither of them actually repent and seek to come back. Indeed, the coin is inanimate, it can't repent. It was actually the woman's fault that it got lost in the first place. Now all these are surely examples of hyperbole- a gross exaggeration to make a point. It isn't the Lord's fault that we stray. But He speaks *as if it is* in this parable, in order to make the point that He so strenuously seeks our return to Him. Likewise Yahweh likens Himself to a worthless husband who forsook His sweet wife of Israel in her youth (Is. 54:6).

God's need for man- as it were- is brought out in this parable. We are compared to a candle that is lit (cp. our baptism) *so that* it may give light to others (Lk. 8:16; 11:33); the woman (the Lord Jesus) lights a candle (He uses believers) to find his lost coin (through our efforts) (Lk. 15:8;

this must be seen in the context of the other two references in Luke to lighting a candle). If we don't give light (God's word, Ps. 119:105) to others, we are a candle under a bucket, and therefore we will lose our faith, the flame will go out. So it's hard not to conclude that if we don't naturally give the light to others, we don't believe. The very nature of a lit candle is that it gives light; *all* candles do this, not just some. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this.

It's been suggested that the lost coin was one of the woman's dowry coins, and thus the story speaks of how every lost person is a personal and deeply felt loss to God. However, this view has been criticized in that a drachma, which had the same value as a silver denarius, was the wage paid to a worker for one day's field work (Mt. 20:1-16). It was far less than the dowry coins. It could be that instead we have here a reference to a desperately poor housewife- who certainly had no dowry money left. The poor were so poor in Palestine at the time of Christ that they were selling their land, and many had become landless labourers. They worked for money, with which they bought food. The husband went far and wide searching for work; the Lord's parable pictures labourers waiting around for work. It's been calculated that on the basis of one denarius / day as wage, even if the worker worked 300 days / year, and had four children and a wife plus himself to support, this income would only enable them to buy enough bread to provide 1400 calories / family member / day. This isn't enough to sustain a person's ability to do manual work. Therefore mothers and children faced malnutrition, and the women tried to grow crops on waste land and did anything for money in order to buy bread. The smiling, full cheeked, charming Mediterranean woman with dowry coins around her forehead (beloved of those Sunday School books about Bible background) just wasn't the scene that the Lord had grown up in. The woman who'd lost her coin was searching desperately for it, because that was what she'd buy the kids food with. No coin, no food, whiny, hungry, sick kids. She needed, desperately needed, that coin; so that she could feed the hungry kids whom she loved and be the *de facto* domestic head which she was. And this is all a picture of God's *need* for the lost, His *need* for us, because He knows the feeding which that lost one can uniquely provide to His beloved family. And one wonders of course whether the Lord's parable wasn't drawn from real life incidents in His own childhood with Mary.

The lighting of the candle is a symbol of our conversion (Mt. 25:1; Heb. 10:32). Our lamps were lit by the Lord Jesus (Lk. 8:16; Heb. 10:32) for the purpose of giving light to the house. The Lord lights a lamp in order to search for his lost coin, that weak brother or sister that means as much to him on a deep, indescribably personal level as a woman's dowry money in the Middle East (cp. a wedding ring; Lk. 15:8). But the lamp he lights is

us. This is yet another example of his parables being intended to fit together. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words).

15:9 *And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying: Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost-* We note the Lord carefully balances the gender issue in these parables; the male shepherd is matched by the woman in the lost coin story. Such was His sensitivity to the value of all persons. As noted on :6, her joyful party reflects how all the Angels are aware of one lost soul being found. And the Lord is justifying His eating with sinners on the basis that they were His friends and neighbours. He was and is the sinner's friend. We recall how when the tax collector Matthew was converted, the Lord had a party to celebrate it along with other tax collectors (Mt. 9:9,10). When Cornelius called together His friends and neighbours to hear the Gospel, he was effectively presenting himself as the lost coin which had been found (Acts 10:24 s.w.).

If we imagine the woman who lost the coin, we sense something of her remorse and desperation as she searches the cracks in the floor for it. It could've been part of her dowry- all that she owned for herself, all that was her very own. Not even her body was hers- it was her husband's, to do what he wished with. But the dowry coins were hers- her very own. If the allusion were to one of these coins, it would speak of how much we mean to the Lord... that I, one of 6 billion, actually mean everything to Him, for whom I am His very own. But the allusion may also be to coins which the peasant women would keep bound up in a rag, close to their body. With this money, the woman would've had to feed the family for the next week or so. But... she'd let the rag come loose, and a coin had slipped out. In either case, we are to imagine the woman searching for it with a sense of remorse, taking responsibility that she was accountable for the loss. And this, we are invited to understand, is how the Lord feels for those who are lost. Notice how the woman searches *in the house*- presumably, she'd not been out of the house since she last had the coin. By filling out this little detail, we perhaps have a picture of how the Lord took responsibility, or felt responsible, for the loss of those 'within the house' of Israel.

15:10 *Even so, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents-* The Lord Jesus purposefully inverted the common assumption that the duty of a righteous man was to condemn the sinners. When He said that there is much joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, the Lord was purposefully inverting the common contemporary Jewish saying that there was much joy in Heaven whenever one sinner is destroyed in judgment. His desire is to seek to save rather than to destroy.

15:11 *And he said: A certain man had two sons-* The man is not that wealthy; for he has only two sons and no other children are mentioned. This heightens the generosity of the father to the younger son, and the tragedy of the waste. The two sons may represent Israel and Judah.

As with most of the parables, the prodigal has a primary reference to the nation of Israel. The many Old Testament allusions bring this home without doubt. In practice, this means that the intensity of repentance which Israel will eventually manifest should be seen in our contrition at sin. In this lies a real challenge. The following allusions demonstrate that our Lord clearly intended us to make a connection between the prodigal and apostate Israel- and therefore with ourselves:

- The father falling on the prodigal's neck and kissing him sends the mind back to Joseph weeping on Benjamin's neck (another younger brother), typical of Christ's receiving home of a repentant Israel in the last days. As Joseph commanded his servants "Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready" (Gen. 43:16), so the father did likewise (:23). Both repentances were celebrated with a meal of fellowship (cp. the breaking of bread). Both the prodigal and the sons humbled themselves to the position of servants. Like the prodigal, Israel were often brought back to their spiritual senses by famine (Ruth 1:1; 1 Kings 8:37; Lk.4:25 etc.). His realization that "I perish with hunger" (:17) matches the description of Jacob in Canaan as "A Syrian ready to perish" (Dt. 26:5), dwelling in a land that was 'perishing through the famine' (Gen. 41:36). This affliction came upon natural Israel because of their 'murder' of Joseph / Jesus. The prodigal's profligacy is therefore to be seen as the crucifying of Christ afresh by the believer.

- The prodigal Israel went "into a far country" (Lk. 15:13) - a phrase normally used in the Old Testament concerning the Gentile lands of Israel's dispersion (Dt. 29:22; 1 Kings 8:41,46; 2 Kings 20:14; 2 Chron. 6:32,36). In passing, the "far country" of Lk. 19:12 and 20:9 should also refer to the lands of the Gentiles; *this* is where Christ has gone (as well as Heaven), and will return to Israel when they desire him to. As with so many of the parables, this one is packed with allusions to the Proverbs. The "far country" recalls Prov. 25:25: "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country". Like many Proverbs, this is alluding to the Law- concerning how Israel would return from the "far country" of their dispersion upon their repentance. The sense of refreshment and exhilaration which this gives God should surely motivate us to repent, and also to encourage others to do so. Yet we need to ask whether we feel this same exaltation of spirit as God does "over one sinner that repents". It requires selflessness, and a real desire to see glory given to our Father.

- Our association of the prodigal with Israel in dispersion is strengthened by the mention that the prodigal "wasted" the Father's riches, the Greek meaning 'to scatter abroad'- suggesting that as Israel had wastefully scattered God's riches in the Gospel, so they too were scattered. Note

how the prodigal is pictured as ending up with the pigs- well known symbol of the Gentiles. As the Son's return to the Father was matched by His going out to meet the son, when Israel "return unto the Lord... then the Lord your God will... return and gather you from all the nations" (Dt. 30:2,3).

- The book of Hosea frequently presents prodigal Israel as the one who went astray from God, her loving Father and husband, committing adultery with the surrounding countries, with the result that God cast her off, leaving her to suffer in those very lands whose idols she had worshipped. Her sense of shame and knowledge of God's constant love then brought her to her senses (Hos. 2; 5:11-15; 6:1; 7:8-10). There can be little doubt that our Lord had his eye on this symbology when framing the prodigal parable. Hos. 2:7,8 is the clearest example: "She shall follow after her lovers... he shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold (cp. the father giving the son his substance), which they prepared for Baal". These blessings of corn, wine and oil are referring to the blessings for obedience promised in Dt. 28. The point is being made that these blessings were not immediately and totally removed once Israel started to go astray. This demonstrates how material 'blessings' are not necessarily an indication that we have favour with God. Consuming the Father's substance "with harlots" (:30) is therefore parallel to giving it to idols. The spiritual riches of being in covenant with God, as well as our every material blessing from Him, were frittered away by Israel. God's "hand" worked upon Israel to make them realize the seriousness of their ways (Hos. 2:10). This fact starts to plumb the depth of God's love- that even with those who have broken His covenant, God's hand is still working to lead them to repentance.

- Jer. 31:18-20 describe how Ephraim moans: "You have chastised me... turn me, and I shall be turned... after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed... I was ashamed... because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son?... since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still... I will surely have mercy upon him, says the Lord". We must not think from this that God just chose to turn Israel (the prodigal) back to him at a certain moment. It was because God "spake against him", through which the prodigal was "instructed", that he turned back.

- There is reason to see the family portrayed in the parable as being a priestly family- thus representing prodigal Israel, "a Kingdom of priests". The son did not ask for his share of the inheritance, but of "the portion of goods"- remember that Levites did not own any land. There is surely an echo of the curse on Eli's priestly family in the prodigal parable: "Every one that is left in your house shall come and crouch... for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray you, into one of the priests offices, that I may eat a piece of bread" (1 Sam. 2:36). The

Father had "hired servants", which takes us back to the reference in Lev. 22:10 to the priests having "hired servants" in their household, who would have performed the mundane work for them (cp. the Gibeonites). The prodigal was therefore asking to be admitted back into God's service, resigning all the spiritual superiorities he could have enjoyed through being of the priestly line. Similarly latter day Israel will be willing to be accepted by God as Gentiles, having resigned their trust in their natural lineage. Our attitude on repentance ought to be similar- just wanting to quietly, humbly participate in God's family for the joy of being close to Him. Further indication that the hired servants represent the Gentiles is found in the fact that they had "bread enough" (Gk. 'an abundance of loaves'), connecting with the Gentiles of Mt. 14:20 being "filled" (same word in Lk. 15:16) with the abundance of loaves created by Christ.

- The parable of the lost son complements that of the lost sheep earlier in the same chapter. "My people have been lost sheep", "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Jer. 50:6; Mt. 10:6; 15:24). A comparison of the parable with Hos.7 :9,10 indicates that most of Israel remain as the prodigal in the pig country: "Strangers have devoured his strength (cp. "devoured your substance"), and he knows it not... they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this". The illogicality of Israel remaining in their pathetic spiritual position is so apparent to us from this; yet we of the new Israel can also be crazy enough to go on living out of real fellowship with God.

The reason for presenting such a catalogue of evidence is to show that prodigal Israel's latter day repentance will be of a similar intensity of repentance to ours in this life. They will mourn and weep with a rare intensity of self-hate and self-knowledge- even as a father for his only son. Do we shed tears on repentance? Do we realize, as they will, how our sins brought about the crucifixion? Do we appreciate that our spiritual indifference and lack of perception means that we, like Israel, "did esteem him stricken", seeing no beauty in him (Is. 53:2-5) as we march through our lives, unthinking as to the power and beauty of the cross?

The younger son is presented as lacking wisdom and being disobedient to the law, as Judah in dispersion. "Whoso loves wisdom rejoices his father: but he that keeps company with harlots spends his substance" (Prov. 29:3) was clearly in the Lord's mind when constructing this parable. He evidently saw this proverb as applying to the same person in time of sin and repentance. Repenting and loving wisdom are therefore paralleled, showing again that repentance is not just a twinge of conscience, but involves coming to really know God. The prodigal wished to return home so that he could share in the loaves which the servants had "to spare", or (better), "had in abundance". This same word occurs in Jn. 6:12 concerning the bread which "remained", i.e. was in abundance, after the feeding of the five thousand. In that acted parable, the bread

represented the abundance of spiritual food which is in the spirit-words of Christ. It was this which the truly repentant sinner earnestly seeks, rather than a mere salving of conscience. "Whoso keeps the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shames his father" (Prov. 28:7) shows that such genuine repentance and knowing of God's wisdom is effectively reckoned as keeping the letter of the Law. "A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causes shame, and shall have part of the inheritance" (Prov. 17:2) seems to also connect with our parable; implying that the wise son who was willing to be a servant was ultimately greater than the son who appeared to be technically obedient to the letter of the law. Likewise, the son desiring to be fed with the husks of the pig food may connect with Lazarus desiring to be fed with the crumbs from the rich man's table (Lk. 16:21). Yet Lazarus is representative of the repentant sinner who is ultimately justified. The degree to which God will so totally impute righteousness to us is indeed hard to come to terms with. But it is faith in this which will be our ultimate salvation.

15:12 *And the younger of them said to his father: Father, give me the inheritance of property that is coming to me. And he divided his property between them-* The somewhat sad picture of the loving Father dividing between his sons "his living", for them to go off and make what they will of, to either squander in the world or selfishly and self-righteously hoard to themselves, is a picture of the vast and genuine delegation to us by the Father. The Father has given us huge freewill and an amazing amount of self-determination. Divine delegation is one of His great characteristics as a Father. It would have been highly unusual for any father to agree to liquidate part of the family estate ahead of time, just so as to give in to the will of a wayward son who totally rejected him. And yet the father did this; he liquidated part of the family inheritance to give it to a son who wanted to openly quit the family. This is how much the Father is willing to give us the essential desires of our own hearts, how much He is willing to allow us to go our own way, so that we may serve Him of our own freewill.

For those Palestinian peasants, politeness and respect to your father was paramount. Even if you didn't obey your father, you had to be polite to him. Rudeness to your father or public disobedience to him was the worst thing you could do, and you shamed yourself. The Lord turned that understanding on its head in His parable of the two sons in Mt. 21:28-32. He taught that the *better* son was the one who rudely refused to do what his father asked, but later relented and did it. The Lord saw this son as better than the one who politely agreed, and yet never fulfilled his promise. Perhaps that parable needs reflection upon today, where 'nicespeak' has become paramount- so long as you say something nicely, what you actually are saying and what you *do* isn't so important. *How* we speak *is* of course important; but it can be exalted to the point where

words rather than real action become paramount. But that aside, the point is that both the sons were *extremely* rude to their Father. And he was the most loving, self-sacrificial dad that two kids ever could've had. We feel hurt for the lovely old boy. One element of unreality is that he only had two sons- a small family for those days. How tragic that both his sons went so wrong and rebelled against him. And we sense something of his hurt, our heart starts to bleed for him, and we think of *our* Heavenly Father's hurt. And then the penny drops- those two boys are us.

The younger son was more than rude in demanding his actual share of the inheritance immediately. He was effectively wishing that his father was dead. He had the neck to treat his lovely father as if he were already dead. There arose in Europe after the second world war the 'Death of God' philosophy and theology. We may distance ourselves from it in disgust, finding even the words grating and inappropriate, but let's remember that the younger son ends up the son who is found in the end abiding in the Father's house and joyful fellowship. This is how we have treated our wonderful Father. We know from the examples of Abraham (Gen. 25:5-8) and Jacob (Gen. 48-49) that the actual division of the inheritance was made *by the father* as his death approached. For the son to take the initiative was disgusting. Although the sons could have some legal right to what their father gave them before his death, they were strictly denied the right of actually having it in possession [i.e. the right of disposition]. This awful son was therefore each of us. And the father responds with an unreal grace. He agrees. He did what he surely knew was not really for the spiritual good of the son. And according to Dt. 21:7, the younger son's share was one third. But the father gives him *half*. The younger son turns it all into cash within a few days [the Greek for "gathered all" definitely means 'to turn into cash']. This would've meant selling the fields and property quickly- and the father would've had to give agreement for this and have been involved in the contracts. Buying and selling takes a long time in peasant culture- selling quickly would've meant selling very cheaply. It would've been the laughing stock of the whole area. The way the son sells the inheritance would've been a more awful and unreal thing in the ears of the Lord's first hearers than it is to us. Naboth would rather have died than sell his inheritance- even to the King (1 Kings 21:3). The lifetime's hard work of the father and family was wasted. And the father went along with it all. This was more than unusual; it would've been outrageous in the ears of the Lord's hearers. But this is the outrageous nature of God's grace. He must be so torn by our prayers- as a loving Father, wanting to give us what we ask for materially, whilst knowing it's not for our good... and sometimes doing so. The father made himself look a fool because of his enormous love for this obnoxious son who wished him dead, this young man who clearly thought solely in terms of 'Gimme the money and I'm outta here for good'. And he thought this with no thought to the huge damage he was bringing upon

the rest of the family. For they would've lost so much through losing half the property. We sense the pain of the father, of the family, and the selfishness of the son. And time and again we are breathless at the love and grace of the father.

Significantly, the son asked for his share of the property- not his inheritance. To receive inheritance carried with it responsibility, of building the house of your father, upholding the family name etc. But this son didn't want that. And the father could quite rightly have said 'No, you get the inheritance when you take the responsibilities that come with it'. But no, this son wants to quit with his lovely father and the whole family name. In that culture, to cut your ties with your home family, your inheritance, your land... was almost unheard of. It was almost impossible to do. But that's what this angry young man wanted. The incredible thing is, the father allowed him to do this! That element of unreality signposts the extent to which God allows us freewill, genuine freedom of determination- and how much it costs Him emotionally and as a person to do so. This is the frightening thing about freewill- how much it hurts and costs God to give it to us. This insight alone should lead to a far more careful and responsible use of our freewill. William Temple said somewhere, something to the effect that God gives us freedom even to reject His love. It's no good reflecting on the younger son and thinking 'But I'm not that kinda guy'. The whole point of the parable is that yes, we are. That's us. We're either like that son, or the self-righteous son who is left standing outside of the father's fellowship. Clearly enough, the God whom Jesus was revealing was *not* based upon some village patriarch. Freud rightly observed that many people's image of God is based upon their experience of human father figures. For the true believer however, the Lord Jesus is revealing a Father-figure radically different to anything they've ever met.

*15:13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered into money all he had, and took a journey into a far country; and there he squandered his inheritance in reckless living-* The same Greek word occurs in 1 Pet. 4:4 concerning Gentiles (and also the latter-day apostasy within the ecclesia?) living in "excess of riot". The corrective to the elder brothers' attitude is provided by the following parable of the unjust steward which comes straight afterwards in Lk. 16. The steward was accused of 'wasting' his master's goods (Lk. 16:1), using the same Greek word translated "substance" in Lk. 15:13, concerning how the son wasted his father's substance. The steward forgave others, and therefore ultimately found a way of escape from his dilemma. The implication is that it was on account of the prodigal being willing to do this, not daring to point the finger at others in the Father's household because of his awareness of his own

sins, that he was eventually saved. We can also infer that the elder brother walked out of the Father's fellowship because of his refusal to do this. Again we see how God works through our sins. Because of the prodigal's experience of sin and forgiveness, he was better able to show that vital love and tolerance towards others, without which we cannot receive God's ultimate acceptance. In a sense, it was much *more* difficult for the elder brother.

15:14 *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country, and he began to be in want-* The prodigal "spent all", just as the diseased woman had "spent all" her living (Mk. 5:26), and now came to take hold of Christ's mantle of righteousness. This we do at baptism. Other similarities between the prodigal and that widow are to be found in *Studies In The Gospels* by H.A. Whittaker. It's bankruptcy, or bankruptcy. Paul spoke of spending and being spent in the Lord's service (2 Cor. 12:15), alluding to how the prodigal spent himself in dissipation. That sense of losing all must come- either in sin's service, or in that of the Lord. See on Mt. 3:11.

15:15 *And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed pigs-* The son was attached to a "citizen of that country", perhaps a personification of the Biblical devil to which we are joined before conversion. He was made free from him the moment he started his journey back. He "was dead, and is alive again" is also baptism language (cp. Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:13). "He arose" from the pigs (Lk. 15:20) certainly implies new life and resurrection.

We don't like to think of ourselves as that thankless young man; but even more do we revolt at the idea that we were and are at times out there feeding pigs. Anyone who's travelled in the Middle East will know the annoyance of a beggar attaching themselves to you and just refusing to leave you. But watch how the locals deal with those types. They don't shout at them, or chase them. They will ask them to do something which is beneath even their dignity as a beggar to do. And they walk away shamefaced. I knew a brother who was a schoolteacher. The boss wanted to fire him because of his Christianity. The boss didn't say 'You're fired! Clear off!'. He simply transferred him to a remote village in the middle of nowhere. And so the brother did the only reasonable thing- he resigned. The young man 'joining' or 'gluing' himself to the rich Gentile citizen was like the beggar who glues himself to you, and you don't know how to shake him off. The pig owner told him to go and feed his pigs- thinking that this would surely be beneath this once-wealthy Jew who was hassling him. But so desperate was the young man, that he had to swallow every drop of pride, national and personal- and go do it. And he felt like a pig- he was willing to eat what they ate. *This* is the picture of our desperation

at every sin- but we need to feel it, if we are to experience the path back to the Father. In an age when sin is often more about the words you type on your keyboard than actual physical debauchery, this parable hits home hard. Of course it was pride which was in the way for the son, and it is swallowing pride which is the essence of repentance. And again, it was fear of shame that delayed the young man's return- fear of having to go through the *kezazah* ceremony of being officially disowned, fear of how the mob of young kids which roam every village street would whistle and shout and sing insults at him. And we need to pause and reflect whether we contribute to this significant barrier which surely hinders so many from returning to the Father's house.

15:16 *And he would gladly have filled his belly with the husks that the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything-* The son was joined to a Gentile, and totally ritually unclean by working with the pigs. All hope of justification by the law was long gone.

15:17 *But when he came to his senses he said-*The sense that the prodigal had of having come to a complete end, realizing the ultimate wretchedness of sin, should be ours when we repent. The prodigal's repentance is ours. The prodigal among the pigs, rising up to return, should be a cameo of our repentances throughout each day. The allusion to the Septuagint of Prov. 29:21 shows how that despite having reached such an "end", there is still a way back: "He that lives wantonly from a child shall be a servant, and in the *end* shall grieve over himself". Yet we know that after that "end", the prodigal returned. The son 'coming to his senses' implies that his life of sin was madness, lived in a haze of semi-consciousness of his real spiritual self. This spiritual anaesthesia is *always* present when we sin. Yet it does not mean that God sees and feels our sins as we do; He has a constancy of spiritual awareness. An appreciation of this may help us in our struggle to sense the true seriousness of sin.

*How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough to spare, but I perish here with hunger!-* The prodigal's perishing with hunger and desperately needing bread suggests a connection with Jn .6:35: "I am the bread of life: he that comes to me (cp. the prodigal's return) shall never hunger... him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out" (cp. the receiving back of the prodigal). This coming to Christ is both ongoing and also specifically at baptism.

God hoped through the hope of Hosea that 'Gomer' would say "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me than now" (Hos. 2:17). But Gomer / Israel would not; and so the Lord picked up the idea and puts it in the mouth of the returning prodigal son in Lk. 15:17.

15:18 *I will rise and go to my father, and will say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight-* His plan was to use the phrase

"I have sinned against heaven and against you"- but this is almost quoting verbatim from Pharaoh's words of insincere repentance in Ex. 10:16! He still failed to grasp that he was his father's *son*- he didn't 'get it', that *this* would be the basis of his salvation, rather than a master-servant relationship with his father based on hard work. It was the father's amazing grace which swept him off his feet just along the street from his father's home; it was the father's unconditional acceptance of him which made him realize what sonship and repentance was really all about.

15:19 *I am no more worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants*- The young man hadn't quite learnt the need for total grace when he decided to return home. He decided to return and ask to be made "as one of your skilled craftsmen" (Gk.- he uses *misthios* rather than *doulos*, the usual word for 'slave'). Presumably he figured that he could work and pay off what he had wasted.

15:20 *And he rose and went to his father. But while he was yet far away, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran and embraced and kissed him*- The Father's speed and zeal is captured by the repeated use of the conjunction "and": "His father saw him, *and* had compassion, *and* ran, *and* fell on his neck, *and* kissed him". The son's careful preparation of his request for mercy was needful for him, but not for the Father. This is a precise allusion to the spirit of Is. 65:24: "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear". This is primarily concerning God's relationship with men in the Kingdom. Yet our daily experience of forgiveness now should give us a foretaste of the glorious sense of restoration with God which will be ours in the Kingdom.

There was a Jewish custom called *Kezazah*, 'the cutting off'. If a Jew lost the family fortune amongst Gentiles, he would be greeted at home by the whole family, who would break a pot and scream 'XYZ is cut off from his people' (Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005) p. 52). The family and community would have no more fellowship with the person (Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) p. 102). Moulton and Milligan describe the record of a public notice by which parents declare their dissociation from their son who had wasted their wealth (J.H. Moulton & G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary Of The Greek New Testament Illustrated From the Papyri And Other Non-Literary Sources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) p. 89). This is what the Lord's Jewish audience would've expected to come next in the story, when the son returns. But no! There is the very opposite. Law and traditional expectation and even human perception of justice is thrown away, as the father races along the street towards his son and accepts him. For an elderly man to run publicly was yet again an unreal element in the story- mature men always walk, at a slow and dignified pace. Not

gather up their robes and run, let alone publicly. Actually the Greek word translated "run" in Lk. 15:20 is that used about sprinting (1 Cor. 9:24,26; Gal. 2:2; 5:7; 2 Thess. 3:1; Heb. 12:1). Here again we see the self-humiliation of the father before men, as he expressed a radical acceptance. Even we from our distance expect there to be a 'telling off', a facing of the issues. But there isn't. The grace of God which meets the returning sinner leads him to repentance. It of itself, by its sheer magnitude, elicits the state of contrition which is indeed vital; but this is inspired by the huge initiative of the Father and Son.

The father's radical acceptance is the very basis of our salvation. It is challenging, supremely so. Perhaps we handle 'classic' repentance easier- someone does wrong, goes off for a long time, is out of sight and out of mind, comes back, asks for our forgiveness with tears and humility. It's actually psychologically hard to say 'No'. *That* kind of forgiveness is relatively easy. But what is so much harder is to show forgiveness and the nature of the father's love and grace time and again in daily life; to keep looking and hoping for the one who has offended us, ruined us, destroyed us, used and abused us... to be coming home. Actually I know virtually none amongst us who rise up to the father's love and grace in this. It remains a stark, sobering challenge to us all.

It needs to be understood that the father had to act as the village expected him to. They expected him to enact the *kezazah*, to hand the son over to them in some form for judgment, to make an example of this awful man. No village member is an island, all have to act within the expectations of the group. But the father breaks through all that. He again humiliates himself before the villagers by doing what he did. He likely angers them- for anger so often comes as a result of being confronted by the grace shown by others. We see it so often in the life of our spiritual community. Indeed, the Lord got at this in another parable, where He speaks of how some were angry at the extreme grace shown by the generous vineyard owner (Mt. 20:1-16).

The Father offered forgiveness without repentance to the prodigal son before there was any direct evidence of repentance- just a sign of general regret or desire to be in the Father's house. Indeed, it would see that the very fact the son *wanted* to return to the Father's house was quite enough to warrant his acceptance there- and the killing of the fatted calf. The Lord's zeal for our redemption and His enthusiasm to see us as righteous is brought out in the parable of the prodigal. The Father (manifest in the Lord) runs out to meet the son. That story was masterfully tied back in to Is. 64:5-8: "You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness, those that remember you in your ways... we have sinned... we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags... but now, O Lord, You are our father". The patient, hopeful father saw in the son a boy rejoicing and working righteousness; but this

was hardly how *he* felt! And so it will be with Israel in the last days. And so it is with each of us now, in our times of repentance. That surpassing grace is ours; we are seen as working righteousness when all we have is a bitter self-loathing and desire to somehow get back to God. But the crucial point is: *how often* do we have such a true repentance? We repeatedly sin, that we admit. But how frequently is there this kind of repentance which calls forth such grace, to see us as so righteous when we are so unrighteous, the grace of Jesus so great, so free...? The parables so often allude to contemporary Jewish conceptions of grace, and show how God's grace is so far beyond them. The Father is watching for the return of the prodigal, even while the son was "far off" (Gk. *makron*); and this is the same word used about the "far (Gk. *makros*) country" where the son was (Lk. 15:13,20). The Divine eyesight sees the person who is far off in sin, and longs for their return. This was quite contrary to all Jewish and human notions of showing grace to those who return - *after* they return. There was a contemporary Jewish story about a son who wished to return to his father; and the father sends a message to him saying "Return as far as you can and I will come the rest of the way to you". The Lord's parable showed how the care of the Father for His children is so far more than that. And He is there watching billions of cases, simultaneously... such is the passionate heart of God for the individual.

We must grow in our realization of the *enthusiasm* of God for our salvation. Consider how the Father ran unto the pathetic son and fell on (Gk. violently seized) his neck and kissed him (Lk. 15:20; the same Greek as in Acts 20:37). The Father restlessly watching for the prodigal's return matches the woman searching for the lost coin "till she find it" or the unusual shepherd who searches for his lost sheep "until He finds it" (Lk. 15:4,8,20). This involves God in huge activity- setting up providential encounters, nudging consciences through circumstance. The huge amount of 'work' is one thing; but the mental energy of concern and thoughtfulness is phenomenal beyond our comprehension. God rises up early seeking His people- rather like us somehow being able to wake up early in the morning without an alarm clock, because our internal clock is restlessly wanting to be up and on our mission for the day. In all this we are to manifest God- for we too are to seek and save the lost.

The elder brother in the prodigal story shows an unbelievably self-righteous attitude. Yet, this truly is the position of the legalists of Christ's day and this. The love of the Father [God] for the son [repentant Israel] is quite something. Would a father really rush out and kiss him, i.e. forgive him (Lk. 15:20 cp. 2 Sam. 14:33) without first requiring an explanation and specific repentance? For this unusual Father, the mere fact the son wanted to return was enough. And when the vineyard

workers refused to work and beat and killed the Owner's servants that were sent, the response we expect is that the Owner sends in some armed men and re-establishes control. But He doesn't. Why ever keep sending servants after some are killed? But this is the loving, almost desperate persistence of the Father for our response. This is what the parables of Israel teach. In the end, He does something humanly crazy. He sends a single Man walking towards them- His only Son. Or think of the parable of the older son. The loving Father divides all that He has between the two sons- and the son who remained at home therefore ended up with *all* that the Father had, seeing the younger son had blown the other half of it (Lk. 15:31). This was the extent of God's love for Pharisaic, hypocritical Israel. He gave them His all- the blood of His only Son. Elderly oriental gentlemen never run in public. But the Father will do so when the younger son returns. Such will be His joy, and such is His joy over every sinner who repents!

*15:21 And the son said to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no more worthy to be called your son-* The son admitted that he had sinned "in your sight", exactly as David confessed after his sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 51:4). In the same way as David openly recognized that he deserved to die, so the prodigal wanted to be made a hireling. Yet in reality, God did not take David's life, the prodigal was not allowed to even get around to saying he wanted to be made a slave (:21 cp. 19), shoes being immediately placed on his feet (:22) to distinguish him from the barefoot slaves.

*15:22 But the father said to his servants: Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet-* The prodigal was not allowed to even get around to saying he wanted to be made a slave (:21 cp. 19), shoes being immediately placed on his feet (:22) to distinguish him from the barefoot slaves. The honour bestowed upon the son by the father is totally unreal. Without the slightest sign that the son is now responsible, is truly repentant, has the right motives... the father gives him the best robe, which is what was done for the person whom a leader wished to honour above all (Esther 6:1-9). And the father gives the son his signet ring (cp. Gen. 41:41,42). All this, before the prodigal has in any way proved himself. All he's done is come home, still not wanting to be a son, just a craftsman; and he was only driven home by his desperation. Such is the huge significance attached by the Lord to our turning up home. And in our dealing with returning sinners, which is every one of us day by day, we should reflect the same attitude.

The record of the prodigal's treatment at the homecoming suggests that we are to see in this the sharing of Christ's personal reward with repentant sinners. Removing his rags and clothing him with the best robe

recalls Zech.3:4, concerning the very same thing happening to Christ at his glorification. Being given a robe, ring and shoes takes us back to Joseph/Jesus being similarly arrayed in the day of his glory (Gen. 41:42). This parable is rich in reference to the Joseph story, with Joseph's brothers typifying Israel and all sinners. But now there is a powerful twist in the imagery. The sinners (cp. the brothers) now share the reward of the saint (cp. Joseph). This is the very basis of the Gospel of justification in Christ, through having his righteousness imputed to us, so that we can share in his rewards. This will fully be realized at the marriage supper of the lamb, although it also occurs in a sense each time we repent, and live out the parable of the prodigal's repentance again. See on Rev. 6:11.

15:23 *And bring the fatted calf, kill it and let us eat and make merry-* The joyful homecoming and celebration feast after the prodigal's repentance then equates with the Messianic banquet. The fatted calf which was killed therefore connects with the "fatlings" which were killed for the marriage supper of the Kingdom in Mt. 22:4. And those Jews who refused the invitation to join in that feast easily equate with the elder brother. "Let us eat and make merry" is alluded to by the Lord in his later description of the marriage supper: "Let us be glad and rejoice... for the marriage of the lamb is come" (Rev. 19:7). "Enter into the joy of your lord" (Mt. 25:21) is the equivalent in the parable of the virgins. There is good reason to think that our Lord consciously designed his parables to allude to each other, and thus build up a more complete picture of his teaching.

The context of the parable is set in :2. It was in response to the Pharisees' criticism of Jesus that he received sinners and ate with them. Jesus is replying by showing that the meal he ate with them was in the spirit of the joyful feasting occasioned by the finding of the lost coin, and the return of the prodigal. The prodigal's repentance is thus likened to those who were responding to Christ's gospel.

Compare "Slay and make ready" (Gen. 43:16). Joseph's welcome of his brothers is the basis of the prodigal son parable (Gen. 45:14,15 = Lk. 15:20); in this case another line of interpretation opens up, with the father representing Christ, and the prodigal is the repentant Jews, wanting to be servants and nothing else.

"The fatted calf" of Christ is 'killed' by God on our repentance in the sense that He is aware once again of the death of Christ whenever we are granted forgiveness. The spirit of Christ groans for us when we sin, as he did on the cross and in Gethsemane (Rom. 8:26). Thus God looks on the travail of Christ's soul when He bears our sins away from us (Is. 53:11). To crucify Christ afresh as it were puts Christ through the process of death on behalf of sin once again, but because the believer does not 'resurrect' to newness of life in forsaking the sin, neither does God 'visualize' the Lord's triumph over the sufferings of sin in the resurrection.

Such a person has left Christ suffering, travailing in soul, groaning with tears, without any triumph or resurrection.

15:24 *For this my son who was dead, is alive again! He was lost and is found! And they began to be merry-* The prodigal son was a favourite of Paul's. At least four times (Lk. 15:24 = Eph. 2:1,5; 5:14; Col. 2:13) he makes the point that he saw the repentant son as a type of every one of us: not just those who publicly disgrace themselves and go out of church life for a time.

As God took His repentant wife back to her former status, speaking of her once again as a virgin, so the Father emphasizes: "This *my son* was dead...". The prodigal was dead, but then became alive (:32), in the same way as baptism marks both a one-off coming alive with Christ, and also the start of a newness of life in which we are constantly dying to sin and coming alive to God's righteousness (Rom. 6:13). Our repentance and subsequent acceptability with God at our baptisms should therefore be on a similar level to our confessions of sinfulness to God after specific sins in our daily lives, and also related to our doing this at the day of judgment.

Yet in the daily round of sin and failure, it is sometimes difficult to sense the degree to which God is actively seeking our return, and willing to slay the fatted calf. The earlier parables of the lost sheep and coin show God actively working to find us; whilst that of the prodigal implies that He is not doing anything physical. Yet the clear connections with the preceding parables show that the woman zealously turning the house upside down must therefore be a figure of the mental energy expended by the Almighty in seeking out our repentance. In our semi-aware spiritual days and hours, before we 'come to ourselves', the Father's active mind is urgently seeking us. Surely this should motivate us in our stronger moments to be aware of the need *not* to sleep into the sleepy madness of spiritual indifference and sin. This indifference is effectively spending our substance with whores and riotous living. Prov. 29:3 is one of the root passages for the prodigal parable: "Whoever loves *wisdom* rejoices his father: but he that keeps company with harlots spends his *substance*". There is a parallel here between wisdom and the Father's substance; continuing a popular Biblical theme that God's spiritual riches are to be found in His words of wisdom. An indifference to the spiritual riches which we have been given in the word of Christ is therefore being likened to the prodigal squandering the Father's substance with whores.

It is hard to appreciate that this parable really is intended to be read as having some reference to our daily turning back from our sins- such is the emotional intensity of the story. Yet such is the seriousness of sin that we must see in it an ideal standard to aim for in this regard. The parable alludes to a passage in Job which helps us better appreciate this. The

prodigal's confession "I have sinned... in your sight", and his returning from spiritual death to life (Lk. 15:21,32) connect well with Job 33:24-30: "His flesh (of the forgiven sinner) shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth (cp. the prodigal): he shall pray unto God, and He will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy... if any say (like the prodigal), I have sinned... and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God *oftentimes* with man". The prodigal's experience will often be worked out in our lives, the fatted calf slain time and again, and as such we will come to know and appreciate the Father's love even more.

The joyous feast around the fatted calf can therefore speak of the full fellowship with God which we enjoy each time we come to repentance. The return of Israel in Hos. 2 was one of the source passages for the parable. The feast at their return is there described as a betrothal feast. This is obviously a one-off act. Yet such is the constant newness of life which we can experience through continued repentance, that the feasts of joy which we experience can all have the intensity of a betrothal feast. In like manner our relation with Christ in the Kingdom is likened to a consummation which lasts eternally.

15:25 *Now his elder son was in the field*- The elder brother coming in from the field must be related to the parable about the servant coming home from the field in Lk. 17:7-10. The servant should then have prepared the meal, on the master's command, and then admitted that despite having been perfectly obedient, he was still unprofitable. The prodigal parable points the great contrast. *God*, while having every right to order the servant/ elder brother to prepare the meal, is the one who has actually prepared it. *God* asks the elder son to come and eat immediately after returning from the field, rather than ordering him to prepare the meal, as He could so justly have done. Yet despite *God's* boundless love, the elder son refused to act and think in the spirit of the Father's love.

*And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing*- A calf, dancing and music recall the scene on Moses' return from the mount (Ex. 32:17-19); the elder brother's response as he returned from the field and beheld this sight may well have been rooted in his attempt to place himself in Moses' place. He zealously protested at what he liked to see as rank apostasy when it was actually the display of the real spirit of Christ, in receiving back a lost soul. For all this, the lesson is never learned. Schism after schism have been experienced over this very issue of having repentant brethren take their place at the memorial feast. The bad grace and bitterness of the elder brother as he stormed away from the happy feast is seen all too often amongst us.

The parable of the prodigal contains multiple allusions to the record of Jacob and Esau, their estrangement, and the anger of the older brother [Esau] against the younger brother (K.E. Bailey, *Jacob And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) lists 51 points of contact between the Jacob / Esau record and the prodigal parable). There is a younger and an elder son, who both break their relationships with their father, and have an argument over the inheritance issue. Jacob like the prodigal son insults his father in order to get his inheritance. As Jacob joined himself to Laban in the far country, leaving his older brother Esau living at home, so the prodigal glued himself to a Gentile and worked for him by minding his flocks, whilst his older brother remained at home with the father. The fear of the prodigal as he returned home matches that of Jacob as he finally prepares to meet the angry Esau. Jacob's unexpected meeting with the Angel and clinging to him physically is matched by the prodigal being embraced and hugged by his father. Notice how Gen. 33:10 records how Jacob felt he saw the face of Esau as the face of an Angel. By being given the ring, the prodigal "has in effect now supplanted his older brother" (A.J. Hultgren, *The Parables Of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) p. 79); just as Jacob did. As Esau was "in the field" (Gen. 27:5), so was the older brother.

What was the Lord Jesus getting at by framing His story in terms of Jacob and Esau? The Jews saw Jacob as an unblemished hero, and Esau / Edom as the epitome of wickedness and all that was anti-Jewish and anti-God. The Book of Jubilees has much to say about all this, as does the Genesis Rabbah (See e.g. Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary To The Book Of Genesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) Vol. 3 p. 176). The Lord is radically and bravely re-interpreting all this. Jacob is the younger son, who went seriously wrong during his time with Laban. We have shown elsewhere how weak Jacob was at that time. Jacob was saved by grace, the grace shown in the end by the Angel with whom he wrestled, and yet who finally blessed him. As Hos. 12:4 had made clear, Jacob weeping in the Angel's arms and receiving the blessing of gracious forgiveness is all God speaking to us. The older brother who refused to eat with his sinful brother clearly represented, in the context of the parable, the Jewish religious leaders. They were equated with Esau- the very epitome of all that was anti-Jewish. And in any case, according to the parable, the hero of the story is the younger son, Jacob, who is extremely abusive and unspiritual towards his loving father, and is saved by sheer grace alone. This too was a radical challenge to the Jewish perception of their ancestral father Jacob.

The parable demonstrates that both the sons despised their father and their inheritance in the same way. They both wish him dead, treat him as if he isn't their father, abuse his gracious love, shame him to the world.

Both finally come to their father from working in the fields. Jacob, the younger son, told Laban that "All these years I have served you... and you have not treated me justly" (Gen. 31:36-42). But these are exactly the words of the older son in the parable! The confusion is surely to demonstrate that both younger and elder son essentially held the same wrong attitudes. And the Father, clearly representing God, and God as He was manifested in Christ, sought so earnestly to reconcile both the younger and elder sons. The Lord Jesus so wished the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees to fellowship with the repenting sinners that He wept over Jerusalem; He didn't shrug them off as self-righteous bigots, as we tend to do with such people. He wept for them, as the Father so passionately pours out His love to them. And perhaps on another level we see in all this the desperate desire of the Father and Son for Jewish-Arab unity in Christ. For the promises to Ishmael show that although Messiah's line was to come through Isaac, God still has an especial interest in and love for all the children of Abraham- and that includes the Arabs. Only a joint recognition of the Father's grace will bring about Jewish-Arab unity. But in the end, it will happen- for there will be a highway from Assyria to Judah to Egypt in the Millennium. The anger of the elder brother was because the younger son had been reconciled to the Father without compensating for what he had done wrong. It's the same anger at God's grace which is shown by the workers who objected to those who had worked less receiving the same pay. And it's the same anger which is shown every time a believer storms out of an ecclesia because some sinner has been accepted back...

*15:26 And he called one of the servants, and inquired what these things might mean-* Wondering what things might mean is an idea used by Luke several times, especially concerning Mary and others at the time of the Lord's birth. The ultimate meaning is grace in God's son. That was the meaning those earlier people were intended to come to, and it was the same for the prodigal.

*15:27 And he said to him: Your brother came, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound-* We are left to imagine in what tone of voice they replied. And whether in fact the elder son already knew what was going on, but was seeking to persuade some of the servants to adopt his perspective.

*15:28 But he was angry and would not go in; and his father came out and encouraged him-* The elder son would not 'go in' to the wedding (Lk. 15:28); and the Lord surely constructed that story to use a word which so often is used about going in to the Kingdom (in Matthew alone: 5:20; 7:21; 18:3,9; 19:17,23,24; 25:21). His point clearly is that those who don't enter into His Kingdom *chose themselves not to do so*, they keep themselves out of the Kingdom, because they cannot bring themselves to

show a true love to their brother. In the end, the very end, we receive our dominant desire.

To refuse a father's invitation to a family celebration was seen as totally unacceptable, rude, and a rejection of one's father. Hence the rudeness of the guests refusing the King's invitations. The older brother would usually have played a prominent role in such feasts. But this son refuses to attend. This would've struck the Lord's initial audience as incredibly rude. Remember how Vashti's refusal to attend her husband's feast resulted in her being rejected (Esther 1). What the older son did would've been seen as an insult to all the guests; and many fathers would simply have rejected and disowned their son for this, or at least, expressed significant disapproval. Indeed, this was expected of him by society and the other guests. But yet again, the father humiliates himself and breaks all Jewish norms and expectations of correctness and decency. He leaves the feast! For the host to walk out was yet again seen as totally rude to the other guests- it of course echoes the shepherd leaving the 99 sheep and going off after the one lost sheep. The father doesn't go out and giving the arrogant, unloving, disobedient son a good talking to, as the audience would expect. Again, as so often, the Lord's parables set up an expectation- and then dash it. The father goes out into the darkness of the courtyard, and "entreats" his son (Lk. 15:28). The Greek *parakaleo* means literally to come alongside, as if the father is inviting the son to stand alongside him in his extension of grace. Perhaps Paul is making one of his many allusions to the Lord's parables when he uses the same word to speak of how he 'beseeches' his legalistic brethren (2 Cor. 5:20).

But all this grace is ignored by the elder son. He insults his father. It may not be so apparent to us, but it would've been picked up by the Lord's first hearers. A son should always address his father in this context with the term "O Father". But he doesn't. He speaks of his brother as "Your son" rather than his brother. He speaks of how the prodigal "devoured *your* living". And he speaks of how he has faithfully served his father *as a servant*- like his younger brother, he failed to perceive the wonder of *sonship*. His awful outburst is doing in essence what his younger brother had done some time before. He was saying that he didn't want a part in his father's family. The "living" or wealth of the family was no longer *his*. He wasn't going to respect his father as his father any more. He didn't want to be in the family, so he wouldn't go to the family reunion. That poor, dear father. And what is the father's response? He calls him his *teknon*, his dearly loved son. Notice how the more common *huios* is used for "son" throughout the story (Lk. 15:11,13,19,21,24,25,30). In the face of such awful rejection, he shows his special love. It's like the Lord giving "the sop", the sign of special love and favouritism, to Judas- as he betrays Him. There's a powerful lesson here for those of us who find ourselves irked and angered by legalistic, arrogant brethren who refuse to

fellowship with the rest of us. There was no anger and irksomeness in the father's attitude. He was only deeply sorry, hurt, cut up... but he so loved that arrogant elder brother. He goes on to say that he gives that son all that he has. But he could only actually do that through being dead! The father is willing to die for that arrogant older brother, whose pride and anger stops him wanting anything to do with his father, whom he has just openly shamed and rejected. And the father wants to die for him. This is to be our attitude to the self-righteous, the divisive, those who reject their brethren.

But of course, there's a real and obvious warning not to be like the older brother. It worries me, it turns me, right in my very gut, when I see so many refusing to fellowship with their brethren because 'He's in that church... they've had her back... she's divorced and remarried... he's never said sorry, his motives aren't right, she only said those words...'. And those attitudes are made out to be expressions of righteousness. It is not for me to judge anyone; I seek to love those who act like this with the love and grief of the father for the elder son. But they must be gently warned as to the implications of their position. By refusing to fellowship with the rest of the family, by making such a fuss about the return of the prodigals, they fail to realize that they are in essence doing what the prodigals have done; and they are de facto signing themselves out of the Father's family. The issues are that serious. The parable isn't just a story with a possible interpretation which we can shrug our shoulders at and get on with life. The Lord's teaching, His 'doctrine', was and is in these parables.

The lost son story finishes, as do the other stories, with a banquet of rejoicing- rejoicing in the father's love. But it's no accident that Luke 15 is preceded by the parable of Lk. 14:15-24, where we have another great banquet- symbolic of our communion in the future Kingdom of God. The connection is clear. We will "eat bread in the Kingdom of God" if we eat bread with the Lord in the banquets of this life. And yet *so, so often* it is said amongst us: 'I won't break bread there. They have X or Z... who is divorced... who's not repentant... they have Q from that fellowship attending there... I'm not going in there'. It is not for us to judge. And I do not do so in what I write here. But it is the fairly obvious teaching of the Lord here that if we won't eat bread with Him in joy now, if we won't celebrate His grace and love for the lost in this life, then we will not in the future banquet. His grace is likely large enough to cover even the self-righteous; but we need to realize the eternal gravity of our decisions and feelings about our brethren in this life. Especially must we come to see ourselves as the prodigal. If we plan on being in the Kingdom, we must identify ourselves with the prodigal, and not with the self-righteous elder son who is left outside of the Father's fellowship, because he placed

himself there.

15:29 *But he answered and said to his father: Look! For so many years I have served you, and I never transgressed a commandment of yours, and yet you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends-* He clearly represents the self-righteous Pharisees, who refused to eat with sinners. In the same way as the Jews refused to appreciate the spirit in which Christ was feasting with the repentant sinners who responded to his message (:2), so the elder brother refused to attend the celebrations. Thus he is set up as representative of hard hearted Israel; and all those in the new Israel who share his characteristics proclaim themselves to be aligned with the legalistic Pharisaism which failed to discern the real spirit of Christ when he was among them.

Yet the Lord is also talking obliquely to Himself. It was so much harder for the Lord to be as patient with sinners as He was, seeing that He Himself never sinned and experienced God's forgiveness. There is good reason to think that Jesus was speaking about the elder brother partly to warn himself. He was the favoured son, having the right of the firstborn. He alone could say to God "neither transgressed I at any time your commandment". The Father's comment "All that I have is yours" (:31) connects with the references to God giving *all things* into the hands of the Son. His constant abiding in the Father's house echoes Jn. 8:35: "The servant abides not in the house for ever: but the Son abides ever". Our Lord seems to have been indirectly exhorting himself not to be like the elder brother, thereby setting us the example of framing necessary warning and rebuke of others in terms which are relevant to ourselves. If our perfect Master was so sensitive to His own possibility of failure, how much more should we be, ever analysing our attitudes to our brethren, "considering (ourselves) lest we also be tempted".

15:30 *But when this your son came, who has devoured your living with prostitutes, you killed for him the fatted calf-* Association with harlots is a common Biblical symbol of committing sin (see James 1:13-15); all our sins are unfaithfulness against Christ our husband. They are not just passing adulteries; the Spirit uses the even more powerful figure of harlotries. There are quite a number of other references in James to this parable, which indicate that the prodigal's experience can apply in an ongoing sense to the believer after baptism. The son '*spending all*' uses the same word which occurs in James 4:3 concerning the believer who 'asks amiss' (cp. the prodigal's request to his father), that he might "*consume* it (same word) upon (his) lusts". James 4:4 continues: "Ye adulterers... know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?". This is all prodigal language. The next verses then seem to go in their allusions, implying that the prodigal is ultimately far more acceptable than the elder brother in the ecclesia: "The spirit that dwelleth

in us lusteth to envy (cp. the elder brother)... God... giveth grace (forgiveness?) unto the humble... draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you (cp. the prodigal's return being matched by the Father coming to meet him)... let your laughter (cp. the son's "riotous living") be turned to mourning... he that speaketh evil of his brother (is) *not* a doer of the law (as the elder brother thought he was), but a judge" (James 4:5-11).

The parables are full of almost incidental indications of how well the Lord knew our nature and how accurately He foresaw the future struggles of His body. He foresaw that the elder brothers would be self-righteous and unwilling to accept back into fellowship the repentant. Yet instead of making the father address the older boy with words like "You hypocrite! You yourself are disobedient! Get away from me, you callous hypocrite!", the Lord puts the words of grace themselves in the father's mouth: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). The Lord foresaw that the elder brethren's relationship with the Father would be damaged by their harshness. But in the way the story ends, I see real hope for the hard line, right wing Christian who condemns his brother, in the light of the Lord's teaching that we will be judged as we have judged. Wrong such brethren certainly are; but their Lord is gracious enough, it seems, to still work with them. In the same breath as the Lord warned that by our words we will be justified and condemned, and that we will have to account for them at the judgment, He also said that whoever speaks words against Him, He will forgive. I'd like to concentrate on other examples of where the Lord Jesus in His sensitivity foresaw this problem of dealing with apparently weak believers.

The prodigal son parable has as its end stress the problem of the self-righteous elder son. This is in fact the crux of the whole story. He refuses the invitation from his father to come in to the feast- an image used elsewhere in the parables to describe rejection of God's invitation. To refuse such an invitation was a public insult and rejection of his Father. He refuses to address his father as "Father" and refuses to call his brother "brother" [cp. "thy son"]. By breaking his relationship with his brother, he broke his relationship with his Father. As we do likewise. And the end stress of the whole wonderful parable is that we are left wondering how the story finished. The elder brother is left standing there, temporarily rejecting his father, wondering... whether to storm off into the evening darkness, or to turn back and go in to the feast and accept his brother. And this is really the essential point of the story, and the appeal which it makes to us. We may just mindlessly forget some disfellowship case of years ago, leave the decision to others, forget in our own minds that there is a brother or sister begging for our renewed fellowship and forgiveness. Yet it is exactly these issues and our response to them which

may decide our eternal destinies. And this was the end stress of the parable...

15:31 *And he said to him: Son, you are ever with me, and all that is mine is yours-* See on :29. Who does the father represent? The context for the three stories is the Lord Jesus justifying his eating with sinners. The fact that the father had received the sinful younger brother is phrased in the same way as the Pharisees' complaint about the Lord Jesus receiving sinners (Lk. 15:2 = Lk. 15:27). And each of the stories involve a closing scene featuring a joyful meal of celebration. The father would appear therefore to refer to Jesus; and yet clearly enough we are intended to see the father as also our Heavenly Father. I don't go for the primitive equation 'Jesus = God'. I'm not a Trinitarian. So I take this to be an exemplification of how "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their iniquities unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Notice in how many ways the father humiliates himself before everyone, and breaks all traditional Jewish expectations to do so. He gives the younger son what he asks, and more than the Law allowed; he runs to meet the son; he accepts the son; he leaves the banquet where he is the host in order to plead with his older son; he doesn't discipline either of his sons as expected. He makes a fool of himself time and again, upsetting Jewish rules and norms. And the younger son pestering the father to divide up the inheritance may indicate that the father was about to die. Likewise, when the father says to the older son that he gives him there and then all that is his... this is language only really appropriate if the father is about to die, or has actually died. Does not all this speak of the cross as the basis for the Father's love, grace and acceptance? That there, God was in Christ to reconcile us to Himself, not imputing sin to us... there the Father was humiliated in Christ, made a fool of, ridiculed. The Almighty God came this low... to the public shame and death of the cross. The suffering of God in the cross was all about rejected and unaccepted love; and so it is to this day.

Much homework awaits someone to work out all the times when the Lord was speaking *to Himself* in the parables, through the elements of unreality. Perhaps He saw Himself tempted to be like the elder brother in the Prodigal parable, who was "always" in the Father's house (as Jesus per Jn. 8:35) and 'everything the father has is his' is the very wording of Jn. 17:10. Or is it co-incidence that the only time the Greek word translated "choked" is used outside the sower parable, it's about the crowds 'thronging' Jesus (Lk. 8:14,42- note how they're in the same chapter and section of the Lord's life)? Was the Lord not aware of how the pressure of the crowds, whom He carefully tried to avoid, could choke His own spiritual growth? Was it for this reason that He begged those He cured not to generate big crowds to throng Him? And thus yet another layer of the Lord's mind and thinking will be revealed to us.

15:32 *But it was fitting to celebrate and be glad. For this your brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found-* We are left, as so often, to imagine how the story finished. How hard it would've been for the younger son to live with the older brother! And one day, dear, darling dad would've died. The younger son would've had *his* sons, been called upon to uphold the family honour, make decisions in the village. We are left to imagine how his experience of grace would've made him judge differently to all others.

The three parables of the lost which climax in the parable of the lost son all depend for their power upon the many elements of unreality found within them; and the lost son parable requires us to fill in many details, try to finish the story, and to take due note of the crescendo of 'end stress' which there is. To appreciate the full power and import of these parables, we need to try to read them through the eyes of the Palestinian peasants who first heard them. Correct understanding of Scripture requires us to read it and feel it within the context in which it was first given. Bombarded as we are by billions of pieces of information each day, especially from the internet, we only cope with it all by letting it all fit into the worldviews and assumptions which we've adopted. Words and information and ideas tend to only fit in to what we've already prepared to house them, rather than us seeing *God's* word as something radically different, and allowing it to totally upset and change our cherished worldviews, constructs and approaches to life. God's word is still words- although they are inspired words. The problem with words is that we read or hear them, and interpret them within our frames of reference and culture. Take an example: "She's mad about her flat!". An American takes this to mean that she's angry and frustrated about the puncture / 'flat tire' which she has on her car. But in British English, the phrase would mean: 'She's really happy and enthusiastic about her apartment'. To understand what the speaker or writer means by those words, we have to understand their cultural background. And so it is with the Lord's teaching, aimed as it was to first century peasants.

## CHAPTER 16

16:1 *And he said also to the disciples-* The Lord Jesus without doubt focused upon the twelve disciples; they were His special love, His predominant concern. And when they came to write up their records of their experience of this amazing Master, they bring this out very much. He clearly chose them in order to impress His character upon them, and then left them to continue the witness to Him. Even in high society, surrounded by the elitist Pharisees, He spoke parables which were to them- even though the others heard (Lk. 16:1,14; 20:45). There is a repeated feature, in Luke particularly, of the Lord teaching the twelve in front of a multitude- as if the huge crowds were there just listening to what the Lord was speaking specifically to the twelve. When one of the crowd interrupts, the Lord quickly returns His focus to the twelve (Lk. 6:19,20 cp. 7:1; 12:1,13,22). For Jesus, the disciples were His focus and priority.

*There was a certain rich man, who had a steward; and the same was accused of wasting his goods-* The corrective to the elder brothers' attitude is provided by the following parable of the unjust steward which comes straight afterwards in Lk. 16. The steward was accused of 'wasting' his master's goods (Lk. 16:1), using the same Greek word translated "substance" in Lk. 15:13, concerning how the son wasted his father's substance. The steward forgave others, and therefore ultimately found a way of escape from his dilemma. The implication is that it was on account of the prodigal being willing to do this, not daring to point the finger at others in the Father's household because of his awareness of his own sins, that he was eventually saved. We can also infer that the elder brother walked out of the Father's fellowship because of his refusal to do this. Again we see how God works through our sins. Because of the prodigal's experience of sin and forgiveness, he was better able to show that vital love and tolerance towards others, without which we cannot receive God's ultimate acceptance. In a sense, it was much *more* difficult for the elder brother.

The parable of the unjust steward must be read in the context of the preceding parables of forgiveness. The man is in debt to his Master, surely speaking of our sinfulness (Lk. 16:3,4 cp. Mt. 18:24). He has wasted his goods- which are given to us at baptism (Lk. 16:1 cp. Mt. 25:14). He *could have* begged, but he was too proud. Therefore *in order to get forgiveness* he raced round forgiving everybody else. This suggests a spiritual selfishness which surely isn't ideal. And yet "the Lord commended the unjust steward".

16:2 *And he called him and said to him: What is this that I hear of you? Render the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward-* See on 20:25. The parable of the unjust steward suggests that there are times in this life when we are called to give an account of our

stewardship- and how we react to those judgment calls is what will affect our ultimate destiny (Lk. 16:2). We have a tendency to consider God as passive to our failures and acts of righteousness, simply because His judgments are not openly manifest. We may forget that on, say, 6.6.96 we swore under our breath in anger... but God, in this sense, doesn't forget. The passage of time doesn't act as a pseudo-atonement for Him as it does in our consciences. The tendency for human beings to assume that God forgets our wrong actions and will never judge them is frequently commented upon in Scripture. "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness", i.e. to judge them for it at a future date (Hos. 7:2). The day of judgment is likened to God 'awaking' (Ps. 68:1; 73:20). Not that He is now sleeping; but then, the principles of His judgment which now appear to lie dormant will be openly manifested. Peter warns that the condemnation of false teachers is given by God in an ongoing sense, and that damnation doesn't slumber (2 Pet. 2:3).

The 'unjust steward' was saved because he forgave others their debts after getting into a mess himself. He wasted his Lord's goods, as the prodigal did (Lk. 15:13 connects with 16:2). Seeing the prodigal represents all of us, the lesson is surely that we all waste our Lord's goods, therefore the basis of salvation is through our forgiving others as an outcome of our own faith in the Lord's grace. This is one explanation of why the parable of the steward flows straight on from that of the prodigal.

One of the most telling examples of an unfinished ending is to be found in the parable of the unjust steward. This is perhaps the hardest parable to interpret; but I suggest the thought is along the following lines. The steward has done wrong; but the element of unreality is that he isn't jailed or even scolded, it's just left as obvious that he can't do the job of steward any longer. The usual response of a master would be to jail servants for running up debts (Mt. 8:23-25). But the Master is unusually gracious. The steward now faces poverty, and so he takes a huge gamble. Before news of his fall is common knowledge, he urgently runs around to those in his master's debt and tells them that their debts are forgiven. His haste is reflected in the way he says "Write quickly... and you... ". He has to write off their debts before his master finds out, and before the debtors know that he now has no right to be forgiving them their debts. His gamble is that his master is indeed such a generous and gracious guy that he will actually uphold these forgivenesses or reductions of debt, and that therefore those who have received this forgiveness will be grateful to the steward, and be generous to him later, maybe giving him employment. The story reflects a theme of the other parables- how the servant knows and understands his master extremely well, and can guess his response. The way the servant invites the beggars to the feast even before his master has told him to do so is an example. But the power of the parable is in the unended story. Does the gracious Master indeed forgive those in his debt? And seeing he is impressed by how the steward

has acted, does he in fact re-instate him, impressed as he obviously is by this sinful steward's perception of his grace? From the other parables we are led to believe that yes, the Lord and Master is indeed this gracious. And of course we are to see ourselves in the desperate position of the steward, staking our whole existences upon His grace and love beyond all reason. For me, this approach to the parable is the only one which can make any sense of the master dismissing the steward for fraud, and then praising him for his apparently 'dishonest' behaviour in forgiving the debtors (Lk. 16:2,8). See on Lk. 10:34.

16:3 *And the steward said to himself: What shall I do, seeing that my master takes away the stewardship from me? I do not have strength to dig. To beg I am ashamed-* This continues the linkage with the ideas of the prodigal son parable which precedes it. The desperate son at rock bottom feeding the pigs is this disgraced steward. He is unable in his own strength to get himself out of this awful situation. He is ashamed to beg, rather like the son proposes to return to his father and ask to become a hired servant, so that he can repay his debt.

"What shall I / we do?" is a question which keeps occurring in the Gospels and Acts. It is one of those phrases which flies out of the text, forcing us to engage with it and to ask ourselves the same question (Mt. 20:32; 21:40; 27:22; Mk. 10:17; Jn. 6:28; 11:47). And especially in Luke: 3:10,12,14 [the whole account of the gospel begins with people being forced to ask this question]; 10:25; 12:17; 16:3,4; 18:18,41; 20:13,15. And Luke brings the question to a head when the crowds ask Peter: "What shall we do?", and the same question is on the lips of the repentant Saul (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 10:6; 22:10). The answer of course is to repent and be baptized; and in the context here in this parable, it is to madly forgive others. But the rich fool ignored that and identified himself with his possessions (12:15), and answered accordingly.

16:4 *I have resolved what to do, so that when I am discharged as steward, others may receive me into their houses-* The parable of the unjust steward must be read in the context of the preceding parables of forgiveness. The man is in debt to his Master, surely speaking of our sinfulness (Lk. 16:3,4 cp. Mt. 18:24). He has wasted his goods- which are given to us at baptism (Lk. 16:1 cp. Mt. 25:14). He *could have begged*, but he was too proud. Therefore *in order to get forgiveness* he raced round forgiving everybody else. And we are to take this same full blooded 'resolution'. This suggests a spiritual selfishness which surely isn't ideal. And yet "the Lord commended the unjust steward"- He makes concessions to our weakness. We all live within parameters of personality and spiritual development which we should exceed but will not- because none of us shall attain total moral perfection in this life. Pride in various forms is typical of those kinds of parameters. This is not to suggest that

we are not to try; rather is this observation merely some comfort in our weakness.

The man envisaged having to declare bankrupt and losing absolutely all things, even his family- for he reasoned that if he forgave the debts of these debtors, they might have him as a family member, just allowing him to live out his days in their homes. It is this same spirit to which we should all be driven by the realization of our sin; willing to cast ourselves upon the mercy of our brethren, to live out our days in humbled fellowship with them.

*16:5 And calling to him each one of his master's debtors, he said to the first: How much do you owe my master?*- The steward knew how much they owed. Quite possibly, the debtors stated a reduced figure, or didn't come clean about every aspect of their debt. But whatever they acknowledged, however they wanted to see it- he forgave them. And this is a pattern for our forgiveness of others, knowing the inevitability of our own shameful judgment. Forgiveness does not involve an agreed version of events and issues. We are to simply and frankly and urgently forgive.

*16:6 And he said: A hundred measures of oil. And he said to him: Take your bill and sit down quickly and write fifty-* See on Lk. 14:5. "Quickly" is the essence of all this; knowing that our judgment is just around the corner, there is no time to be lost in forgiving others. The steward reduced the debt rather than totally writing it off. That may be merely the furniture of the parable, but perhaps we are left to imagine that the further he reduced the debt, the more likely they were to later accept him as a family member (:4). And maybe we are intended to deduce that he would have been better to offer them a total forgiveness rather than some negotiated settlement.

*16:7 Then said he to another: And how much do you owe? And he said: A hundred measures of wheat. He said to him: Take your bill and write eighty-* The man who owed oil was forgiven more than the man who owed wheat (100 reduced to 50, compared to 100 reduced to 80). Perhaps this reflects how our forgiveness is not of the frank and total measure of the Lord's, for in another parable we read of the Lord Himself frankly forgiving the total debt of His servant, rather than just reducing it somewhat. The steward had the power to act in his lord's name in reducing or even cancelling debt. Perhaps here we see here some reflection of the idea that what we unloose on earth is unloosed in heaven; our forgiveness of others is in a way accepted by God. How exactly this works out, and the mechanism and theology of it, is not explained. But there is some connection, however vaguely expressed, between our forgiveness of others and God's forgiveness of them. Whilst the steward is commended (:8), he could have totally forgiven them. We too tend to make limited deals of forgiveness with others, at least in our own minds; writing down

the debt of one more than for another. When we ought to scribble the whole thing.

*16:8 And his master commended the unrighteous steward, because he had done wisely. For the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light-*

There were times when the Lord used shock tactics to get His message over. He did and said things which purposefully turned accepted wisdom and understanding on its head. Thus He touched the leper, spoke of drinking His blood... and used leaven, the usual symbol for sin, as a symbol of the quiet influence of His Gospel. And His parables feature the same element. Because the parables are so familiar to us, we can overlook the fact that their true character is intended to be shocking and disturbing- they are most definitely not just comfortable, cosy, moralistic tales. Consider the way He chooses to take a lesson from a crook who fiddles the books. The 'hero' of the story was a bad guy, not a good guy. Yet the point of the story was that we must realize how critical is our situation before God, and do literally anything in order to forgive others. We can't let things drift- disaster is at the door unless we forgive others *right now*. Everything is at stake in our lives unless we forgive others. The parables didn't give simple teaching to those who first heard them. He used that form of teaching so that men would *not* understand Him; and even His disciples had to come to Him in order to receive the interpretations.

The way "the children of this world" are so zealous in forgiving others their debts so as to get themselves out of major trouble is an example to us, the Lord said. It could be that His comment that they were "wiser than the children of light" was a rebuke to the children of light- that those in the world are more eager to forgive, more zealous in their secular lives, than many of us are. The unjust steward in the parable of Luke 16 ran round forgiving others their debts, so that in his time of crisis and judgment he would have a way out of his own debt problems. And in the context of forgiving our brethren, the Lord holds him up as an example. But He laments that sadly, the children of this world are often wiser than the children of the Kingdom, i.e. the believers. I take this as meaning that the Lord is sorry that His people don't see the same obvious need to forgive each other, in view of their own inadequacies and the coming of judgment. The children of this world see the coming of their judgments and the urgency of the need to prepare, far more strongly than many of us do; we who face the ultimate crisis of sinful, responsible man meeting with an Almighty God.

The story of the indebted steward likewise stresses the importance of true forgiveness. The master commends the steward because he had told

others that their debts to his master were reduced. No *human* master would ever commend his steward for acting so irresponsibly. But the Lord Jesus does commend us for forgiving those who sin against Him, even though our forgiving of those indebted to us and Him is against all the laws of human common sense. See on Mt. 18:23.

16:9 *And I say to you: Make to yourselves friends by means of worldly riches; that, when they shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings-* The parable has been about forgiveness, following on from that of the prodigal son. But the Lord makes this parable have another meaning- concerning the need to use wealth wisely.

The Bible has a lot to say about the sacrifice of 'our' material possessions; not because God needs them in themselves, but because our resignation of them to His service is an epitome of our whole spirituality. So great is the Lord's emphasis about this, that He suggests in the parable of the crafty steward that if we use our worldly things prudently, when we spiritually fail, the fact we have used them wisely will bring us into the Kingdom. This implication that we can almost buy our way into the Kingdom is hyperbole. This is a device the Lord commonly used in His parables: an exaggerated statement to make a point. When He spoke of the good shepherd leaving the 99 good sheep to go chase the foolish one, this doesn't really mean that He does in fact leave us. He will never leave us. But so great is His love of the lost that it's *as if* He leaves us for the sake of finding them. Or the command to gouge out our eye if it offends us. This is a gross exaggeration; but our self-deprivation of those things which lead us into sin requires the same self-will and self-mastery. So here, the Lord is saying that the use of our material possessions is so important that it's *almost as if* (in the hyperbole) we can buy our way into the Kingdom. See on Lk. 11:41.

We have nothing now, we own nothing, all we have is given for us to use wisely, so that when we fail (morally, in the failures of our lives), our use of these things may prepare the way for our entry into the everlasting place of the Kingdom. We fall so easily into the trap of thinking 'this is *my* money... *I* worked for it, saved it...'. It's God's money. The danger of materialism is to think it is *ours*. Israel were told that every seventh year they were to cancel debts, release each other from the debt they had; and yet it was "the *LORD's* release". You released a man from his debt, Yahweh released him. What it meant was that your money was Yahweh's money. He released the debt, you released it. In being generous spirited, then, and realizing 'our' money is God's, we are Yahweh-manifest. We are invited to see ourselves as the Levites- whose inheritance was Yahweh, and not anything material in this world. Relationship with God and the honour of doing His service was seen as the ultimate antidote to

materialism. Eliphaz seems to have perceived this when he told the wealthy Job: "Lay thou thy treasure in the dust... and the Almighty shall be thy treasure" (Job 22:24,25 RV).

There is no doubt that our attitude to materialism is a sure indicator of our real spiritual position. We are to make friends of mammon [riches] by giving it away, forsaking all we have- the implication being that riches / mammon are our spiritual enemy, no matter how little of them we possess. And yet we are surrounded as never before by a materialistic, money *loving* world.

16:10 *He that is faithful in a very little, is faithful also in much, and he that is unrighteous in a very little, is unrighteous also in much-* God Himself 'detests' the mammon which man so highly esteems (Lk. 16:13-15 NIV). A day will come when man *will* despise material possession. "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold... to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks... for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty" (Is. 2:20,21). But for us, today is the day of the Lord's coming in judgment. If we will be forsaking all we have in that day; we ought to now, in spirit. The parable of the unjust steward surely teaches that our attitude to the "mammon of unrighteousness" will determine our eternal destiny. The wealth of this world is called "that which is least... that which is another's [i.e. God's]" (Lk. 16:10,12 RV). We are told: "make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail [at the Lord's return], they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles" (Lk. 16:9 RV). There will come a day when money will fail, and when we will despise it for what it was- "that which is least".

16:11 *If therefore you have not been faithful in the handling of worldly riches, who will commit to your trust the true riches?-* Lk.16:11,12 draws a parallel between the "true riches" and "that which is your own"; both phrases, in the context, refer to our reward in the Kingdom. The true riches is the spiritual knowledge of God. In Christ are hid all the riches of God. David rejoiced at the truths of the word more than at finding great riches. We can look forward to a highly personal knowledge of God in the Kingdom; the riches of knowledge "which is your own". This is in the same sense as Rev. 2:17 speaks of each believer receiving a stone with "a new name written, which no man knows saving he that receives it". No other being will be able to enter into the personal knowledge of God which we will then have; as even in this life, it is scarcely possible to enter into another believer's spirituality and relationship with God. To some degree, the Kingdom will be something different for each of us, although this diversity will be bound together by the great unity of all being the

collective bride of Christ, and all manifesting the same God, all having the same "penny a day".

If we are faithful with the riches we have been given, *then* we will be given the true riches of eternal salvation. This "unrighteous mammon" is not our own, it is the wealth of "another man", i.e. God, just as the steward was dealing with money which was not his but his lord's; whereas in the Kingdom, we will have our very own "true riches". This is an altogether lovely idea. Whatever we have now is not ours; we come into this world with nothing, and at death we carry nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). We must give our all if we are to attain the Kingdom.

If we are faithful in how we use the things lent to us by God in this life, we will be given "the true riches". What we now have is "the Truth", because this is how the Spirit speaks of it. But Truth is relative, and the Truth God wants us to accept as Truth is doubtless designed by Him to be acceptable by mere mortals. But it isn't "the true riches" spoken of here. We are asked to be faithful in that which is God's, and then we will be given "that which is your own" (:12) in the Kingdom, as if we will be given "true riches" which somehow are relevant to us alone, the name given which no one knows except ourselves (Rev. 2:17). "Riches" represent the riches of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:13), and they are paralleled with "that which is your own", as if somehow in the Kingdom we will be given a vast depth of spiritual knowledge and perception which is in some way relevant to us alone. To me, those few words of Lk. 16:11,12 take me to the brink of understanding what the Kingdom will be about. We can go no further.

16:12 *And if you have not been faithful in what is another's, who will give you that which is your own?*- See on :11. The time is soon coming when I will be given that which *is* my own- the things associated with being in the Kingdom. We are slaves now, owning nothing (1 Cor. 6:19), but then we will be gloriously free (Rom. 8:21). So this idea of owning nothing, not even ourselves, is only true of this life; the day of release from slavery will dawn, we will receive that true freedom and that true concept of personal possession- if *now* we resign it. Abraham really grasped this idea that we now can own nothing. He swore to Yahweh as "the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is yours..." (Gen. 14:22,23). He knew that Yahweh is the owner of all, and *therefore* he was not going to yield to the temptation to increase what appeared to be 'his' possessions. See on 1 Cor. 6:19.

We are asked to be faithful in that which is God's, and then we will be given "that which is your own" in the Kingdom, as if we will be given "true

riches" which somehow are relevant to us alone, the name given which no one knows except ourselves (Rev. 2:17). "Riches" represent the riches of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:13), and they are paralleled with "that which is your own", as if somehow in the Kingdom we will be given a vast depth of spiritual knowledge and perception which is in some way relevant to us alone. The reward given will to some degree be totally personal. Each works out his *own* salvation, such as it will be (Phil. 2:12)- not in the sense of achieving it by works, but rather that the sort of spirituality we develop now will be the essential person we are in the eternity of God's Kingdom.

16:13 *No servant can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else, he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money-* The Lord Jesus surely based His words on those of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:21: "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon". So although on one hand the Lord Jesus Himself quotes Elijah's 'truth' approvingly, there is evidence galore that at the very same time, Elijah's attitudes were far from Christ-like. At the very same time, Elijah mocks the Baal worshippers, teasing them to shout louder, because maybe their god has gone 'in a journey'- a Hebraism for 'gone to the toilet' (1 Kings 18:27). This kind of mockery and crudeness is surely not how the Father and Son would have us act. Yet Elijah did this whilst at the same time deeply believing the fire would come down, and bringing it down by his faith. And saying other words which were alluded to with deep approval by the Lord.

Mammon is an "abomination" (:15)- a word associated in the Old Testament with idol worship. We are to not only be free of such idolatry, but despise materialism.

16:14 *And the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things; and they scoffed at him-* Scoffing at Divine wisdom recalls so many passages in Proverbs. They were "fools" for all their appearance of wisdom. They justified their love of money (:15), seeing their wealth as a reward for piety, just as the false gospel of wealth does today. They scoffed because they claimed that wealth was the reward for righteousness. But the rest of this chapter records the Lord's deconstruction of that position. They scoffed at the idea of reducing the debts of another- they would've tried to get out of the problem by some other way.

16:15 *And he said to them: You are they that justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God-* As noted on :14, they justified their love of wealth by claiming it was a reward for righteousness. But the Lord says that wealth is abomination to God. He saw as it were the wealth in

their hearts, and hated it, treating it as an "abomination"- a term the Old Testament uses for idols.

*16:16 The law and the prophets were until John. From that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached-* This is an explanation of the cut-off point between the time of the Kingdom, and the period of the law and prophets. It was as if their work was being done up until John. The *law* prophesied until John (Mt. 11:13) in the sense that in the Messiah whom John proclaimed, the law's prophecies were fulfilled. Note that the law just as much as the prophets is to be seen as prophesying. And yet other changeover points or boundaries are suggested within the New Testament. The law would 'pass' when all was fulfilled, which seems to hint at the 'finishing' of all when the Lord cried "It is finished!" on the cross. The law would not pass *until* this point (Mt. 5:18). The Lord's death was clearly a major ending point for the old system. And yet Heb. 8:13 speaks of the old system as decaying and becoming old, and being about to vanish away- surely in the destruction of the temple in AD70. There are other hints in the NT that the old system somehow operated with some level of acceptance from God until AD70. Why the different potential changeover points? Presumably because the hope and intention was that John would successfully prepare the way, and the Messianic reign would be ushered in by Israel's acceptance of their Messiah. And yet they killed Him. That point in itself was the theological changeover moment. But still not all Israel accepted the apostolic preaching of repentance for the crucifixion. And so in practice, the changeover point came when the temple was destroyed and any serious obedience to the old covenant was thereby rendered impossible. In all this we see God's amazing grace and desire continually to work with people, factoring in the possibility of their repentance.

*And every man enters violently into it-* Just as the unjust steward urgently ran around trying to forgive others once he realized his own soon coming judgment, so John's declaration of judgment soon to come led repentant people to urgently dash into the Kingdom.

This can be seen as constructing a parable from the idea of Roman storm troopers taking a city. And those men, the Lord teaches in his attention grabbing manner, really represent every believer who responds to the Gospel of the Kingdom and strives to enter that Kingdom. The same word translated 'take by force' is used by the Lord here in Lk. 16:16; true response to the Gospel of the Kingdom is a struggle. Entering the Kingdom is a fight (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7), and we are right now in process of entering the city of God's Kingdom. It's not that we have no idea as to whether we shall enter it, waiting for judgment day to inform us. We have a sense of purpose to us, being in process of entering now. We either violently snatch / take the Kingdom by force (Mt. 11:12), or the devil of our own nature will snatch us away (s.w. Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12).

The choice before us is that pointed: fight or fall. The Lord graciously and generously saw the zeal of the mixed up, uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going. The cause of the Kingdom must be forcefully advanced by "violent men". This was the sort of language the Lord used. He wasn't preaching anything tame, painless membership of a comfortable community. The Lord saw the zeal of the uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going.

*16:17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tittle of the law to fall-* Mt. 5:18 speaks of jot and tittle. Vine comments: "Jot is for jod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Tittle is the little bend or point which serves to distinguish certain Hebrew letters of similar appearance. Jewish tradition mentions the letter jod as being irremovable; adding that, if all men in the world were gathered to abolish the least letter in the law, they would not succeed. The guilt of changing those little hooks which distinguish between certain Hebrew letters is declared to be so great that, if such a thing were done, the world would be destroyed". The Lord is reminding them that they were under the Mosaic law. All their schemings to get around its more inconvenient requirements, in order to preserve and extend the wealth which they loved (:14), was in fact a breaking of the law which they were under.

*16:18 Everyone that puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he that marries one that is put away from a husband commits adultery-* The context here speaks of the need for forgiveness and a lack of materialism, which the Pharisees tried to cleverly get around by their various twists of the Mosaic law. Hence :17 has reminded them that they are still under that law. These two issues were particularly relevant to how and why they divorced their wives; and so this talk about divorce is exactly in context. And the next parable goes on to criticize them for their attitude to wealth. The divorce and remarriage in view is therefore specifically that practiced by the Pharisees, and is being criticized for not showing forgiveness and for being motivated by a love of wealth and its preservation.

*16:19 Now there was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, dining sumptuously every day-* The context is of the need to hold feasts to celebrate fellowship with the dirty prodigal who had been licked by pigs in chapter 15. The Pharisees loved wealth (:14), and have been set up as the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal. Their dining whilst excluding Lazarus equates with the older brother refusing to have a feast with the presence of the dirty, smelly, unclean younger son. This exclusion went on "every day". The clothing in purple and fine linen

could mean that it is specifically Annas or Caiaphas the high priest who is in view. We marvel that the Lord would even bother to try to get him to see the error of his ways; but such was His desire that literally all men repented. Purple and fine linen recalls Babylon in Revelation 18:12, which in its first century application refers to the Jerusalem temple cult who were persecuting the Christians whilst enjoying huge wealth. Dining sumptuously" is the word used of the rich fool (12:19). The Lord is calling Caiaphas / Annas and the Jewish leadership no more than fools.

16:20 *And a certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores-* The "gate" is s.w. "porch" as in the temple porch, Mt. 26:71. 'Lazarus' is a form of Eleazar- 'God is my help'. He was the helper of those excluded by the Pharisees of the temple cult.

16:21 *Desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores-* "Desiring" continues the linkage with the prodigal parable, where the prodigal 'desired' to be fed with pig food (15:16 s.w.). The rich man should have invited Lazarus to his feast just as the Lord invited sinners to his. And the same word is used of the Gentile woman who wanted to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the table of orthodox Jewry (Mt. 15:27).

16:22 *And it came to pass, that the beggar died; and he was carried away by the angels into Abraham's breast, and the rich man also died and was buried-* "Abraham's breast" or bosom was a Rabbinic phrase referring to Paradise. The Lord is not teaching that the faithful literally go anywhere on death let alone to Abraham's breast; He is clearly using the terms and ideas which the Jews were familiar with, and telling a story within those frames of reference. Adam Clarke comments: "By the phrase, Abraham's bosom, an allusion is made to the custom at Jewish feasts, when three persons reclining on their left elbows on a couch, the person whose head came near the breast of the other, was said to lie in his bosom. So it is said of the beloved disciple, Jn. 13:25".

Carrying by Angels after death is not a Biblical idea, but again is alluding to apostate Jewish beliefs.

The way the Lord constructed His parable about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 is proof enough that He Himself alluded to false ideas without correcting them, but rather in order to make a moral point within the faulty framework of understanding of His audience. Indeed, the Bible is full of instances of where a technically 'wrong' idea is used by God without correction in order to teach a higher principle. Thus an eagle doesn't bear its young upon its wings; it hovers over them. But from an earth-bound perspective, it would appear that [looking up], the eagle is carrying its young on its wings. God accommodates Himself to our earthly perspective in order to lead us to Heavenly things. He doesn't seek to

correct our knowledge at every turn, or else His end aim would not be achieved.

We assume too quickly that the Lord's reference to the Angels carrying Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham means 'straight after his death'. But not necessarily so. He died, was buried, and then at the Lord's return, the Angels will carry the faithful to judgment / the Kingdom- they will go forth and gather the elect. The rich man would only be thrown into Gehenna at the last day, as Jesus so often taught elsewhere. The only element of accommodation to, or parody of, existing Jewish beliefs was in the rich man asking that Lazarus be returned from the dead to warn his brethren. And this element is doubtless inserted into the story by the Lord as a prophecy of how even His resurrection would not convert those who did not truly listen to the Old Testament.

So serious is the tendency to material acquisition that the Lord uses a telling hyperbole in Lk. 16 (in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus): He implies that the rich man was condemned just for being rich. This is hyperbole, an exaggeration to make a point. And the point was, that being rich is *very likely* to lead you to condemnation. The rust of riches is likened to the fire of condemnation and rejection (James 5:3).

16:23 *And in Hades-* As noted on :22, the Lord used ideas current amongst the Jews for reward, i.e. "Abraham's breast", and here He likewise uses their ideas of what happened as punishment. But this doesn't mean He approved their ideas as true. Job 21:13 clearly explains what happens to the rich on death: "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave".

*He lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his breast-* Forget, for one moment, that 'the rich man and Lazarus' is a 'difficult passage'. Focus on how Lazarus is "in" Abraham's 'bosom' or chest. This doesn't mean literally inside it. He was 'in' Abraham's arms, on his chest; and this is explained to us in :25 as meaning that Lazarus was receiving "comfort" at the same time as the rich man was experiencing torment. Mic. 7:5 uses the same figure of being "in" a man's bosom to describe how a wife is held by her husband. And Lam. 2:12 uses it again to mean 'receiving comfort'. This is what the Kingdom will be like, especially immediately after our reward. For this is what the parable is about- the rich man will not be eternally tormented, his torment will be on knowing the reality of the fact that he stands there rejected. But while he is temporarily tormented, some poor beggar brother is getting comforted by Abraham. Both of them with Divine nature. Abraham holding the other brother to his chest and comforting him. And, in passing, this would interpret for us John's words in Jn. 1:18:

"The... son, who is in the bosom of the Father" (after His ascension). After His ordeal, Jesus was as it were receiving comfort from His Father. There was and is an emotional bond between them. And so there will be between us all in the Kingdom. The parable of Lk. 16 goes on to say that there will be those who will want to cross over from rejection to acceptance, and *also*- and note this- there will be some who will want to go the other way to save those in the group of the rejected- weeping, screaming, gnashing their teeth as they will be. But it won't be possible for them. Even in Divine nature, some of us will have the desire to do the impossible- to save those rejected. It will be rather like the Angels in the time of Ahab suggesting their plans of action to God, but they were all turned down except for one. To have Divine nature, as Angels do, doesn't preclude having emotional thoughts. Nor does it mean we will have 100% understanding of God's ways beamed into us.

16:24 *And he cried and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame-* The rich man appeals to his physical descent from Abraham ("father Abraham"), but this is of no value. As Lazarus had begged crumbs, so now the man begs for drops of water. His hard heartedness to Lazarus is exactly related to his punishment.

In the day of judgment, that man will cry out "father... have mercy / pity on me", just as Lazarus used to cry out to him daily. The apparent terseness and indifference of Abraham's response in the parable is surely intended as a reflection of the attitude which the rich man had shown to Lazarus in his mortal life. A great gap had been *fixed* between the saved and the rejected; and the language begs the question, 'Fixed by whom?'. Clearly, by the rich man in the attitude he adopted in his daily life. For it would not be God who fixed a gap between the damned and the saved; through His Son He seeks to save and bridge such gaps. The lesson is that whenever we hear the voice of the desperate, we hear inverted echoes of our own desperation at the final judgment. And how we answer now is related to how we will be answered then. We make the answer now.

Note that the parable talks in terms of tongues, fingers etc.- bodies and not 'immortal souls' are in view. Note that only 11 of the 26 parables recorded in Luke are called "parables". This is clearly a parable and not to be taken as a literal description of things. G. B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke* (Penguin Books), p. 191 concludes that "the story of the wicked rich man and the pious poor man, whose fortunes were reversed in the afterlife, seems to have come originally from Egypt, and was popular among Jewish teachers. ...It was not the intention of Jesus to propagate a strict doctrine of rewards and punishments...or to give a topographical guide to the afterworld."

16:25 *But Abraham said: Son, remember how you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now here he is comforted, and you are in anguish-* "Son" reflects the Lord's pity and tenderness even towards the condemned. Or it could be that this continues the idea of the rich man appealing to Abraham as his father. Indeed he was a son of Abraham- but that was of no avail. Abraham is dead and not yet rewarded (Heb. 11:8,13,39,40) so the idea of Abraham being alive after death is all the language of the Jewish beliefs being used. In the same way the Lord spoke as if Beelzebub really existed, when this was a pagan god (Mt. 12:27 cp. 1 Kings 1:2).

16:26 *And besides all this, between us and you there is fixed a great gulf, so that they that would pass from here to you cannot, and none may cross over from there to us-* The eternal chasm between them was foreseen by the Psalmist: "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity [cp. the condemned goats]: but peace shall be upon Israel [the sheep, looking on at the rejection of the wicked]" (Ps. 125:5). Those who will want to cross the chasm then will be unable to (Lk. 16:26); the great gulf is fixed. In the context of describing the establishment of the Kingdom, we read that God's servants will eat, drink and rejoice, singing for joy of heart, at the same time as the rejected will be ashamed, hunger and thirst and howl for "breaking of spirit"- all the language of the rejected (Is. 65:13,14,17,18 RVmg.). It seems that this is a picture of the rejected watching the accepted eating with Christ as the Passover is eaten anew. Hence their howling and shame; for shame implies being naked in the presence of others. Thus the rejected will in some sense be in the presence of the accepted.

16:27 *And he said: Therefore I beg you father that you would send him to my father's house-* The point of the parable is at the end, and such 'end stress' is common in the parables. After death, there is no literal communication between the rewarded faithful and the wicked; these were all incorrect Jewish ideas which the Lord was using to construct a story which led up to His major point. He as God's messenger had indeed been sent to the father's house, the people of Israel and their leadership, with an appeal to urgently repent.

16:28 *For I have five brothers-* The High Priest Annas had five sons who each succeeded to the Priesthood,—Eleazar, Jonathan, Theophilus, Matthias, and Annas. These therefore were the brothers in law of Caiaphas, who appears to be the rich man in view.

*That he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment-* The fact that sin really does result in eternal death, and that death is really unconsciousness, there is no immortal soul, the Hebrew word *nephesh* doesn't mean that, leads us to preach the hope of

resurrection which we have. It must do- for otherwise we would be plain selfish. And it makes us realize for ourselves the decisiveness and finality of this life's decisions for the determining of eternal destiny. The hope of resurrection is the first and most basic need of our fellows. It was said of the 18th century British preacher Richard Baxter that "he preached as a dying man to dying men". Our mortality, and our appreciation of that of others, should lead to an intensity of appeal to them. Knowing the truth about death leads to a great desire to testify to others. Recall how the rich man in the parable, once he perceived the truth about the death state, earnestly wished to testify to his brethren and persuade them to believe (Lk. 16:28). Elie Wiesel tells how victims of the holocaust either facing death or reflecting upon it later, felt an overbearing desire to testify to others: "We [victims of the holocaust] have all been witnesses and we all feel we have to bear testimony... and that became an obsession, the single most powerful obsession that permeated all the lives, all the dreams, all the work of those people. One minute before they died they thought that was what they had to do". We don't- quite- have to go through those starings of death in the face to perceive death as we should; for the Bible has a lot to say about it, and if we accept the Biblical definitions, then we too will feel this strong compulsion to testify to others.

*16:29 But Abraham said: They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them-* The Lord's argument was that hearing the Old Testament was going to be more motivational to change than meeting the risen Jesus. In Jn. 14-16 He likewise seems to discount His personal presence; the disciples were so upset that He would not be physically with them, but He assures them that the presence of His Spirit in their hearts was going to be of far greater spiritual moment for them than His physical presence. Resurrected persons of themselves were not going to be a powerful source of persuasion to the Jews unless the hearers first of all respected Moses and the prophets. And this very thing, in which Jewish Orthodoxy were so proud, was actually their weak point. The Lord in Jn. 6:45 makes the same point; every man who had truly "heard" the prophets would come to Jesus as Lord.

*16:30 And he said: No father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent-* Reflect on what the Lord was really saying in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It was Abraham who showed the rich man how useless were human riches. The rich man thought that his natural ancestry was enough- he appeals to "father Abraham". But the point of the parable was surely that the rich man was not a true son of Abraham because he had been materialistic and had neglected the needs of his poorer brother. *This* was and is the implication of being a true son of Abraham.

16:31 *And he said to him: If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, even if one rises from the dead-* See on Lk. 24:11. "Persuaded" is parallel with "repent" (:30). Repentance is a persuasion; whether it takes seconds, minutes or years, we are persuaded towards it.

The parable of the rich man and the poor beggar Lazarus surely carried with it the message that we ought to be generous to the poor; and that there is a need to do this in view of the judgment to come and sense of the future we may miss because of our selfishness in this life. The condemned rich man wanted to warn others of the need to be generous to the poor so that they would not be condemned. The Lord's comment was that it was His resurrection from the dead which was intended to "persuade" people of this (Lk. 16:31). Accepting the import of His resurrection therefore should result in our being "persuaded" towards a life of generosity to the marginal- just, of course, as the Lord's death and resurrection was God's grace to us, the marginal beggars in spiritual terms.

## CHAPTER 17

17:1 *And he said to his disciples: Stumbling blocks are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!*- The context of chapter 17 has been an appeal to the Pharisees to accept the likes of the prodigal son and the beggar Lazarus, and not to make them stumble by refusing to have them present at their fellowship table- continuing a theme which began at the beginning of chapter 15. The Lord is urging the disciples not to have any part in the system which caused stumbling. The Jewish religious system caused men to stumble, as the Lord often pointed out (e.g. Mt. 18:7). But there would be an especial woe to the individuals who caused the stumbling, because for doing this they will be liable to personal condemnation. The Jewish world, the system, was to face the "Woe" of Divine judgment specifically because it made men stumble spiritually. That's what these words of Jesus seem to be saying, and His criticisms of that system recorded elsewhere would accord with that view- the 'Woes' He pronounces on the Jewish system in Mt. 23 particularly focus on the damage that system did to people, and the barrier it became between God and man.

17:2 *It would be better for him if a millstone was hung about his neck and he was thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble-* As noted on :1, the "little ones" in view are the likes of the prodigal son and Lazarus. Our attitude to the spiritually "little", the spiritually vulnerable, is critical to our discipleship. And not having them at our table, like the elder brother of Luke 15 and the "rich man" of chapter 16, is to cause them to stumble. So often, those turned away from fellowship then stumble. And the woe pronounced is so great that we have to urgently enquire of ourselves whether we are in any way responsible for such exclusions. Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation. The Lord taught that the believer who makes his brother stumble should have a millstone hung around his neck and be cast into the sea (Lk. 17:2). This is exactly Babylon's judgment (Rev. 18:21). The unloving in the ecclesia will be treated like the unloving world whose spirit they share.

17:3 *Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him-* The context of :2 is that we must not make little ones stumble; and we make them stumble by not forgiving them, not welcoming them at our table, like the elder son of chapter 15 and the "rich man" of chapter 16, which forms the context for these words. This is alluded to in Acts 20:28, where Paul says we should *take heed to ourselves* of the likelihood of false teachers. Surely what he's saying is 'Yes, take heed to forgive your brother personal offences, take heed because you'll be tempted *not* to forgive him; but have the same level of watchfulness for false teaching'. But the Lord is not necessarily teaching

that we are to only grant forgiveness upon repentance; for the implication of much Bible teaching is otherwise. He may be setting us up to think that this is what He means, and then in :4 He challenges us by saying we should forgive even if repentance is so evidently insincere that effectively it is not repentance.

The Greek and Hebrew words translated 'repentance' strictly mean a change of mind, and not necessarily any works / actions. God in this sense can 'repent'. It seems to me that we have to recognize a changed state of heart in our repentant brother, without demanding 'works'. In Mt. 18:15, the Lord says of a sinful brother: "If your brother sins... go and point out the fault... if he listens to you, you have regained your brother". But in Lk. 17:3, He says: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him". This would parallel the brother's 'repentance' with him 'listening' to you. Seeing repentance is a state of the heart, and we simply can't know the hearts of others, it seems to me very hard indeed to judge the level of another's repentance.

"See that you despise not one of these little ones" is how the parallel account puts it (Mt. 18:10). We offend people by 'despising' them, as the "rich man" did to Lazarus and the older brother did to the prodigal. To *not* seek others' salvation by forgiving them is to despise them. We may not think we are spiteful people. But effectively, in His eyes, we are...if we neglect to actively seek for their salvation until we find it. To not offend others is thus made parallel to seeking their salvation.

17:4 *And if he sins against you seven times in the day and seven times turns again to you, saying: I repent: You shall forgive him-* Peter found it hard to grapple with the idea that the degree or amount of sin was irrelevant. But "seventy times seven" indicated how far out he was. Even when a brother's repentance seems humanly unlikely (the 490th time in the day, the seventy sevens of Matthew, takes some believing!), we must still have that covenant mercy for him. Note that only a verbal repentance was required- and the Lord said that the forgiver was to just accept this, rather than demand evidence of 'forsaking' in physical terms. The Greek word for repentance is a compound meaning 'to think differently after'. Repentance is essentially a changed *attitude of mind*. This is why it's difficult to judge whether it exists within the heart of another person. and the Lord seems to be saying that we are not to judge the quality of another's' repentance, which effectively means not demanding repentance before forgiving. We live constantly in need and receipt of mercy, every second of our existence. The New Covenant is often spoken of in the Old Testament as "mercy" and/or "truth". If we are *in* that Covenant, we are permanently living *in* grace/mercy. Mercy is not something which we just receive in the few moments while we pray for forgiveness. It is something constantly ongoing. We live *in* it. If we appreciated this, we would not see

our forgiveness of others as something we occasionally 'grant'; we will extend mercy to them constantly, as God does to us. So the Lord's apparent requirement for repentance before forgiveness in :3 is tempered by this explanation- that we are to forgive when repentance seems so insincere that it is not repentance. This is rather typical of His teaching style and usage of language and ideas.

*17:5 And the apostles said to the Lord: Increase our faith-* The disciples asked that as a community, their faith may be increased so as to forgive others as Jesus requires them to. They believed, correctly, that faith can be given directly by the Lord; and through His Spirit He likewise works on human hearts today too. The same word is used in Mk. 4:24 of how the Lord adds spirituality to those who have it. The Lord's response is that they should on an individual level realize that even if they were perfectly obedient, they were "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10)- and the only other time that term occurs on the Lord's lips is when speaking of how the unprofitable servant will be cast away to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 25:30). What He's saying is: 'Imagine condemnation. Being cast away as you stand before the judgment seat. That's you- that's what *should* happen, even if you "do" all. Get it- you're saved by grace, an amazing grace- respond to that, and forgiving others and zealous service will flow easily and naturally enough from that'.

*17:6 And the Lord said: If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this sycamore tree: Be rooted up and be planted in the sea- and it would obey you-* As noted on :5, the faith in view concerns the ability to accept and forgive others. And the Lord says that if they had faith, then the sycamore tree could be planted in the sea. Israel was then covered with sycamore trees (1 Kings 10:27) to the point that the tree became emblematic of Israel (Is. 9:10). By faith, they could extend Israel to the Gentiles, the sea of nations. The choice was either to be cast into the sea in condemnation for refusing to accept the spiritually little ones (:2), or to take the hope of Israel into the sea and plant it there, so that the sea of nations became as the land of Israel. 'Planting' is a metaphor regarding the teaching of the Gospel in 1 Cor. 3:6-8, and the parables of the 'planting' of a vineyard likely have the same sense. It was by faith, the disciples' faith in inclusivity and grace, that the gospel of the hope of Israel could be taken to the Gentiles. And the mustard seed is a symbol of the basic Gospel, which grows up into a tree giving shelter to the Gentiles (13:19). Here, it refers to their faith in grace, forgiveness and inclusivity toward others- which was necessary for them to take that Gospel to the Gentiles.

*17:7 But who is there of you, having a servant ploughing or keeping sheep-* Not all the disciples were dirt poor. Their fishing business employed hired servants. The parable about "one of you" having a

servant ploughing and preparing his food was spoken to the twelve. This continues the theme so far developed in the chapter; that we should have the love, faith and vision to be forgiving and radically inclusive of others. The disciples had asked for more faith to forgive effectively without repentance [when repentance is patently insincere]; and the Lord gives part of the answer in this observation that we are all desperate sinners. The motivation for radical forgiveness of others is because we recognize that even if we are fully obedient, we are "unprofitable servants"; and even the highest standard of behaviour, as was seen uniquely in the Lord, is simply what is expected of us as God's servants.

*That will say to him when he comes in from the field: Come immediately and sit down to eat-* We are not worthy to sit at the table of our master and eat. Eating together has been a theme of this entire section, beginning in chapter 15, where the Lord answers the objection that He eats with sinners. The elder brother of chapter 15 and the "rich man" of chapter 16 refuse to eat with the likes of the prodigal son or Lazarus. To motivate us in not being exclusive and rejecting our brethren from the Lord's table, we are here reminded that our place at His table is by grace. For in no secular situation at that time would a servant ever eat at his lord's table as an equal, let alone have his master serve him there. And yet this is that the Lord Jesus does to us; this is the unique nature of His table.

*17:9 Does he thank the servant because he did the things that were commanded? I think not-* A master doesn't thank his slave for ploughing all day. When he comes home in the evening, the slave's job is to get the Master's food ready, and then when the Master has been looked after, he can get himself something. The Master has no need to thank (Gk. *charis*, s.w. to give "grace") the slave, and the slave expects nothing else. This is how the Lord sees our works; He expects us to serve Him for nothing, because of our role as His slaves, and not because we expect any gratitude, recognition or reward. We serve because we are His slaves. The parable teaches that absolute obedience should be the norm of our lives, not the exception, and that this is only what our Master demands and expects. From the way He told the story, the Lord framed our sympathy to be with the slave. But His point is that when we have done all, worked all day and then gone the extra mile in the evening, we should still feel unprofitable slaves, slaves who aren't much profit to their Master. The passive, unspoken *acceptance* seen between Master and slave in the parable should be seen between us and the Lord. There is no attempt by the Lord to ameliorate the Master : slave figure; "You call me master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am" (Jn. 13:13). And yet we are told that at the judgment we will receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5). This can not, therefore, be praise of our efforts at obedience; it will be praise for the status we are in on account of being in Christ, being counted as righteous as Him. The parable was spoken in the context of the disciples thinking

that God would be very happy with them if they forgave their brother seven times a day (Lk. 17:3-6). But the Lord is replying that things like this, which to us may seem going more than the extra mile, should be the norm; such heights of spirituality are only the daily ploughing of the field, and are only the obvious minimum which Christ accepts. He won't shew us grace ("thank") for doing this- with the implication that His grace is totally undeserved, not related to our forgiveness of others or other acts of obedience. The story paints the Master as being rather ungrateful and hard, to see his servant work so hard, then go the extra mile, and not utter a word of thanks. And the Lord is saying: 'Yes, to the natural mind, that's how I am'. Christ says that the slave will not expect the Master to say to him "Sit down to meat", but will expect to be told, tired as he is, to gird himself and serve his Master (Lk. 17:7,8). The Lord's words here are surely intended to recall when He said that in the Kingdom He would make us each sit down to meat and come forth and serve us (Lk. 12:37). The point of the connection is to show that Christ's treatment of us in the Kingdom *will* be different from that of an ordinary Master, but we really, honestly shouldn't expect it; we should serve because we are His servants, not expecting any praise or response from him. And this experience of grace should motivate us to forgive whether or not the repentance seems sincere (:5). As it happens, He will give us all this in the Kingdom, but we shouldn't expect this at all. As the slave would have been dumbfounded if his Master did this, so should our response be in the Kingdom. What makes it difficult is that we *know* our Master is like this, that He's a most unusual Lord, one who washes our feet (Jn. 13:13,14); and the extraordinary relationship we have with Him ought to make us eagerly desire to show a similar service to our brethren, and to forgive them whether or not their repentance appears sincere.

The story of the slave who worked all day in the field and was then expected to come home and cook for his master without a word of thanks to him seems to be more realistic, lacking the element of unreality usually seen in the parables. But the Greek word *charis*, usually translated "grace", is the one used for "thank" here. The point is that we don't receive grace because of our going the extra mile, as we are inclined to think. We receive grace, but not as a result of all our special efforts; these are what are expected of us, on account of the fact that we have become slaves to our Master, the Lord Jesus. At the end of all our special efforts (in whatever sphere), we must consciously make an effort to recognize that we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10). This must surely connect with Mt. 25:30, which describes the rejected at the day of judgment as unprofitable servants. If we judge / condemn ourselves, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). This is just one of many examples of where the Lord's parables seem intended to be linked with each other- which further proves that they are not stories with a deeper meaning, whose storyline is not intended to be carefully considered. We must recognize not only that we are unprofitable servants, but that we have only done

what was our "duty" or debt to do- the implication being that we were sold into slavery on account of an unpayable debt. This is exactly the figure used by the Lord to describe us in Mt. 18:25.

17:10 *Even so you also, when you shall have done all the things that are commanded of you, say: We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do-* It may be that this is taking us forward to the Kingdom; it is at the judgment that we 'do all' (Eph. 6:13), it is in the Kingdom that we will obey all the commandments (Ps. 119:6). This parable is a glimpse into the appreciation of grace we will have as we enter the Kingdom; once we are fully righteous, we will realize how unprofitable we are of ourselves (notice we may still feel in a sense "unprofitable" then). We will realize that all our service is only the repaying of the huge debt incurred by our sinfulness. *Then*, and perhaps only then, will we see works in their true perspective. This surely is the purpose of the judgment seat. We will walk away with the sense of wonder at the grace of Jesus that filled the one-hour workers as they walked away from the pay table with a day's wages.

The sin offering to be offered after the Nazarite vow had finished (Num. 6:14) suggests the principle of Lk. 17:10 was being taught even back there. There was to be no spiritual pride in commitment made apparently over and above God's minimal requirements. The language of "have done all those things which are commanded" recalls the language of the priests and Moses doing all things which were commanded them under the old covenant (Ex. 29:35; Lev. 8:36; Dt. 1:18). Lk. 17:10 would therefore be hinting that even complete obedience to God's law was not of itself enough to make a man profitable unto God, which was something Job likewise concluded (Job 22:2). And the legislation about concluding the Nazarite vow was teaching the same.

We shouldn't be discouraged if in our self-perception we see ourselves as serious sinners. We must say of ourselves that "we are unprofitable servants"- i.e. condemned, for this is how the phrase is used elsewhere in the Lord's thinking (Mt. 25:30). This is the finest paradox of all. If we perceive ourselves as worthy of condemnation, we will be saved. If we would judge [i.e. condemn] ourselves, we will not be judged / condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). If we understand the seriousness of our sin, then forgiveness of others will come easier- and this is the purpose of the story (:5). If we realize our utter spiritual desperation, our worthiness of rejection, our betrayals of our Lord's love, if we condemn ourselves in our own judgment; *then* we will not have to go through this process when the Lord comes. Yet if we don't do this, Paul says, then we are drinking condemnation to ourselves at the last day. It's a powerful, terrifying argument. Such *must be-* not ought to be- our level of self-analysis and

knowledge of our desperation. If we so know our desperation now, we will not be condemned. Knowing and feeling our desperation is the key to so many Christian problems: monotony and boredom in spiritual life, problems with our partner, with our ecclesia, pride, a critical, ungrateful spirit, a lack of heartfelt praise, a reserve in witnessing. Even division amongst us would be outlawed by a true sense of our personal desperation. See on Lk. 6:42.

As slaves, we serve without expecting any thanks at all; and the service in the immediate context is forgiving our brother whether or not his repentance appears sincere. We do what is our duty to do by reason of who we are- sinners. The Lord spoke this in response to the disciples saying it was impossible for them to accept His teaching about unconditional forgiveness of each other (:5). Man's ingratitude is perhaps one of the hardest winds to weather, and it can so easily blow us off course in our service. But as the Lord's slaves, judged by Him alone, we didn't ought to look for recognition of our labours nor our forgiveness of others; neither should we demand apologies for *anything*. The Lord humbled Himself to wash the feet of His brethren, even though He was their leader (Phil. 2:4-11 is full of allusion to the foot washing incident, as if there the Lord exemplified the spirit of the cross). There may be brethren who consider it beneath them to talk to others or forgive others, who think it is not for them to help wash up or move furniture or all the host of other tasks that our gatherings require. But in these things lies the spirit of Christ. Paul didn't lord it over others, but was a fellow-worker with them (2 Cor. 1:24). It is one of the finest paradoxes: that he who is the greatest must be the servant of all. See on Mk. 10:45.

*17:11 And it came to pass, as they were on their way to Jerusalem, that he was passing along the borders of Samaria and Galilee-* Time and again, the Gospel records reveal how the disciples manifest the Lord Jesus. There are several passages where the text is unclear, as to whether it should read, e.g., "*As they were on the way*" or "*As He went*" (Lk. 17:11 RV cp. AV). The textual confusion may reflect the unity between the Lord and His preachers. Even within the Gospels, incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same.

Even when He was heading away from Jerusalem during the course of that final journey, He's still described as going to Jerusalem. This was the degree to which His focus was upon His journey unto death; when He passed through a Samaritan village, His whole body language was as if He were going up to Jerusalem (9:53). And we are asked to have the same focus and sense of direction as we carry His cross.

*17:12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men*

*who were lepers, who stood far away-* Reflect how the group of ten lepers huddled together, Jew and Samaritan together, their differences sunk in their common appreciation of their desperation. In deep seated humility, we can wait with unfeigned faith for the day of acceptance to dawn, serving with a true love, not interested in feuding with our brethren, thankfully partaking of the emblems with them, not forgetting *how* we were cleansed from our past sins (cp. 2 Pet. 1:9 RV- a sure allusion to the nine ungrateful lepers who forgot the wonder of their cleansing). If we remember how we were cleansed, then there will abound in us virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, culminating in a true love (so Peter's logic runs in 2 Pet. 1:5-9). For our desperation, the cross of the Lord Jesus, the frankness of the Father's forgiveness- these things will ever *live* within our grateful, gracious souls.

*17:13 And they lifted up their voices, saying: Jesus, master, have mercy on us!*- The grammar suggests they the many had one voice. And yet they included at least one Samaritan, with whom normal Jews would have nothing to do. The basis of our unity should be our desperation for grace and healing.

*17:14 And when he saw them, he said to them: Go and show yourselves to the priests. And it came to pass, as they went, they were cleansed-* The motive for this in 5:14 had been in order to make a testimony to the priests. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true. We noted on Mt. 8:3 that the work of the priests was to cleanse the leper- but this had been done by the Lord. The man was therefore to show himself to the priests- in order to demonstrate to them that another priest and priesthood was already coming into operation.

The healing happened "as they went". There had to be an element of faith and obedience before the cure- in this case. For the Lord operated variously when it came to preconditions for healing.

*17:15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, glorifying God in a loud voice-* He turned back from going to the priests to thank the Lord, because he perceived that not only would he as a Gentile not get much audience with them, but because he saw that the Lord Jesus was far greater than the priesthood. He took the initiative in technically disobeying the Lord's commandment to come and thank the Lord. It was when he saw that he was healed that he praised God. The others presumably thought that their full healing would only be once they appeared before the priests. But the Samaritan perceived that the total power of healing was with the Lord and that the priests had no role to play in this. Being a Samaritan and therefore separated from the community of Israel made this perception somewhat easier for him, just

as those outside religious systems find it easier to perceive the direct hand of the Lord Jesus in their lives- once they encounter Him.

*17:16 And he fell upon his face at his feet, giving him thanks- though he was a Samaritan-* Jews and Samaritans had no dealings, and yet they lifted up their voices as one voice (:13 Gk.). They were united in their desperation, just as we ought to be. This is one of many hints that the work of the Lord Jesus was for non-Jews as well as Jews, and that the Gentiles would respond better to it. The command to go and teach "all nations" the Gospel seamlessly follows from all these hints throughout the Lord's ministry, and the disciples and the early church were all the more culpable for initially refusing to perceive it. But such is the power of assumed correctness of inherited positions, prejudice, nationalism and elitism- even within the hearts of otherwise sincere believers.

*17:17 And Jesus responded: Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?-* The Lord's response was to the Samaritan. The implication was that the Lord was deeply disappointed in the Jewish response, and in their consideration of the priestly acceptance of them as being far more important than gratitude to their healer-Messiah. And He wanted the Samaritan to know that indeed, Israel were not OK with God. The Lord Jesus was on that man's side and not, in that sense, approving of Israel just on the basis of their ethnicity. The question as to "Where are the other nine?" was a leading one. The answer was 'With the priests'. The implication was that they should have been with the Samaritan at the Lord's feet, and not, in the first instance, with those priests.

*17:18 Were there none found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger?-* This comment seems more towards the disciples, or perhaps the Lord was just speaking to Himself. The Samaritan had returned to Jesus, glorifying God (:15). It would be far too simplistic to assume that Jesus as He stood there was God Himself. For no man can see God. Further reflection reveals a far profounder situation. By returning to Jesus in gratitude, the man was glorifying God. The worship and glorification of the Son is therefore to the glory of God the Father, as Phil. 2 makes explicit.

*17:19 And he said to him: Arise and go your way. Your faith has made you whole-* The healing had occurred "as they went" to the priests (:14). It could be that the Lord is saying that the man's faith had made him so whole that he didn't need to go to the priests. He was to go his way, back to his Samaritan community, as the living witness to the Lord's passionate care for non-Jews. Luke seems to stress the role of faith in the cures (7:50; 8:48). He also speaks more about Samaritans than any other gospel; perhaps because his material was partly aimed at converting Samaritans and other Gentiles.

17:20 *And being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God comes, he answered them and said: The kingdom of God comes not with observation-* The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4). "When will the Kingdom come?" was another perennial question- again answered by the Lord redirecting the entire enquiry. "The kingdom of God is within you... as it was in the days of Lot... one shall be taken and the other shall be left" (Lk. 17:34). 'Don't worry about the calendar date, don't let a fascination with prophecy distract you from the personal reality that whenever I do come, some will be left behind. Will that be *you*?'. See on Lk. 19:11. The implication could be that the Kingdom of God is hastened by action- by the repentance of Israel, the spiritual maturity of God's believing children, intense prayer, outreach to the Gentile world and other preconditions for the Lord's return. It will not be hastened by attempts to match current events with Bible prophecies- which perhaps is what the Lord refers to by "observation" here. It's as if He is warning against the obsession with latter day political prophecies which has stymied so much spirituality over the ages.

And yet "observation" translates a word which only Luke uses to describe how the Jews critically "watched" Jesus (6:7; 14:1; 20:20). They were actually looking at Him; the Kingdom was amongst them. They need not observe / look around / watch out for Messiah any further.

17:21 *Neither shall they say, Here it is, or, There it is! For the kingdom of God is among you-* The life that He had and now lives is the essence of the Kingdom life. Who He was and is, this is the definition of the Kingdom life. It's why one of His titles is "the kingdom of God". And it's why it can be said that we 'have' eternal life now, in that we can live the essence of the life we will eternally live, right now. "The kingdom of God is within you" (AV) is more correctly translated "the kingdom of God is *among* you" (see A.V. mg.). The context shows that Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees (:20); the "you" therefore refers to them. They were certainly not Christian believers- the kingdom of God was not established in *their* hearts. The Jews were making a great public show of their zeal in looking for Messiah. In this passage, "the kingdom of God" seems to be a title of Messiah, seeing He is to be the king of the kingdom. Thus when the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people shouted, "Blessed is he (Messiah) that comes in the name of the Lord: blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that comes in the name of the Lord" (Mark 11:9,10). This parallels Messiah and "the kingdom". Thus John the Baptist preached that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he (Jesus) that was (prophesied)" (Matt. 3:2,3). So here, the Lord answered their question about "when the kingdom of God should come", by speaking about the coming of "the son of man". His point was that the Jews were making so much show of being on the look out for Messiah's coming, expecting Him

to be suddenly revealed in power, that they failed to realize that that Messiah- "the kingdom of God"- was already among them in the humble person of Jesus. Thus He warned them: "The kingdom of God (Messiah) comes not with outward show... behold, the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:20,21). A well known theologian, Joachim Jeremias, has come to the same conclusion: "The meaning 'indwelling in' can certainly be excluded. Neither in Judaism nor elsewhere in the New Testament do we find the idea that the reign of God is something indwelling in men, to be found, say, in the heart; such a spiritualistic understanding is ruled out both for Jesus and for the early Christian tradition" (Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1972) p. 101). He goes on to draw out the parallel between Lk. 17:21 and Lk. 17:23,24: "Neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you...And they shall say to you, Lo, there! Lo, here! go not away, nor follow after them: for as the lightning, when it flashes out of the one part under the heaven, shines unto the other part under heaven; so shall the Son of man be in his day".

The parallel is between the Kingdom of God coming at the return of Christ at the last day- and the Kingdom being 'within' or 'among' you. Jeremias suggests on this basis that "the Kingdom of God is within / among you" means 'The Kingdom of God will come among you suddenly and visibly, at the last day- so it's no good expecting it right at this moment now'.

Who He was and is, this is the definition of the Kingdom life. It's why one of His titles is "the kingdom of God" (Lk. 17:21). And it's why it can be said that we 'have' eternal life now, in that we can live the essence of the life we will eternally live, right now.

*17:22 And he said to the disciples: The days will come, when you shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and you shall not see it-* Yet Jn. 8:56 implies it is always possible to see one of the days of the Son of man through faith in Him. As explained in Jn. 14-16, the promised Comforter would enable believers to always have the same sense of the Lord's presence as His followers had during His ministry. Is the Lord not hinting here that there will be a clouded spiritual vision amongst His latter day followers, even though they will "desire" this not to be the case? And can we not see uncomfortable similarities with our position and feelings today, realizing our vision is somewhat clouded, desiring for things to be different, but still not seeing...?

The Lord's coming is "the day of the Son of man"; and yet He speaks of the days of His ministry as the days of the Son of Man. The Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. The same Jesus who was then in Palestine, speaking from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew, is essentially the same who shall return, likewise as judge, friend and patient saviour. Lk. 17:24-26 speaks of the "days of the Son of man" and refers them to three things:

1. The days of the Lord's ministry

2. The time leading up to His return
3. The day of judgment, of His actual second coming.

Putting these together, we come to the following conclusion: those living in the very last days will effectively be living with the actual presence of the Lord, it will be as if He has physically returned, although He has not done so. This may well be in order to provide encouragement to the persecuted saints in their latter-day tribulation; but it surely suggests that they will *know* that the Lord is about to return, that they are living in the days of the Son of man. The Comforter will be poured out, or accepted, so that the believers feel strongly the Lord's presence.

*17:23 And they shall say to you, Look there, or, Look here. Do not go, nor follow after them-* The Lord has been teaching that He is "amongst" them; there is no need to go looking for Him anywhere. But His thought moves on specifically to the time of His return. For the Lord repeats this warning in the Olivet prophecy. There will be false Christs and bogus claims that the Lord has returned. Spoken to the disciples, this suggests that they were the ones who would see these things associated with the return of Christ. But they did not. And in any case, all twelve of them were being addressed, and one of them would turn away from Christ. So there was in any case a conditionality attached to the Lord's words.

"Lo" [AV] suggests the actual pointing out of a person. "Here... or there" is poor translation, because the same original word is behind both "here" and "there". The impression is given of people pointing out actual individuals and claiming that 'This is Christ'. The faithful are to flee once the sign is obvious that the Lord is about to be revealed, and in those days [and they may literally be days or hours] the world will know that His return is imminent, and therefore all manner of charlatans will start claiming 'It's me!'. The relatively few claims to be Jesus Christ which are made today are hardly credible, no temptation at all for the faithful, and nearly always the person making the claim is mentally ill. But the Olivet prophecy suggests that these claims by false Christs will be so credible that even the faithful will be sorely tempted to believe them. The risk of deception would be so great that the Lord repeatedly warned against it. If there is some worldwide sign that the Lord is about to return, perhaps literally in the sky, as "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", then in those days, such claimants will have far more credibility. It could be that one claimant is particularly persuasive, leading to the final show down on Mount Zion between the true Christ and the anti-Christ, the fake duplicate of Christ.

*17:24 For as the lightning shines from one part under the heaven to the other part under heaven, so shall the Son of Man be in his day-* This is the "lightning" and earthquake associated with the return of Christ when His people, natural and spiritual, are at the nadir of persecution and

tribulation (Rev. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). Lightning doesn't do as described here. The reference is therefore to the Old Testament manifestation of lightning as part of the Cherubim, which flashed with lightning (Ez. 1:4,14). Ezekiel saw the Cherubim depart from the temple (24:1 has alluded to this already), go Eastward to the mount of Olives and then mount up to Heaven (Ez. 10:19; 11:22,23). This is why "the Glory", the lightning of the Cherubim chariot, was seen as returning to the Mount of Olives "by the way of the east" into the temple (Ez. 43:2-4).

As the Lord stood amongst them, He was the Son of Man in His day. Those who accepted Him as Messiah were accepting His 'coming' to them. For those who did not, and who argued about whether or not He fulfilled all the prophecies they were analysing ["with observation"], He would 'come' unmistakably, but in judgment. The day of the Lord was right upon them, if only they would realize it; and they made the decision standing right there as to whether they would then be saved or condemned.

*17:25 But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected by this generation-* We wonder whether the Lord's tone of voice and body language changed; having talked of the glories of His second coming, He returns to the reality that He must be crucified by His people. The Lord's rejection by Israel is a major theme (Mt. 21:42; Mk. 8:31; 12:10; Lk. 9:22; 20:17; 1 Pet. 2:4,7 all use the same word). Any who struggle with rejection find an instant connection with the Lord. It has been given to us to "suffer for His sake", the same word used here for "suffer" (Phil. 1:29). His sufferings are reflected in our experience, that we might experience in practice the status of being "in Christ". The passages just listed mainly state that the Lord would be rejected by "the builders", by the "elders... priests... scribes". Now He extends that to all "this generation". They followed their religious leaders- to reject God's Son and all His love. This is the danger of following religious leaders without thinking things through for ourselves from God's word.

*17:26 And as it was in the days of Noah, even so shall it also be in the days of the Son of Man-* See on 2 Pet. 2:5-8. "The days" are parallel with "the coming" of the Lord. The scenario outlined elsewhere is of the Lord 'coming' for the faithful, them consciously choosing to go to meet Him, and then their 'coming' along with Him in judgment upon the unfaithful and Israel's immediate enemies. Therefore a period of time is made parallel with the Lord's "coming". The "days of Noah" may refer to the way in which God told Noah of the flood, but in Gen. 7:1,4 told him that now there were "yet seven days" until the flood actually came, and he must now enter the ark. The gathering of the animals was done within those seven days (Gen. 7:1-3). In this lies the similarity with the last days. We know the outline picture- that judgment will come, and there

are reasons and signs of that. But only a few days before judgment breaks will the faithful be invited to go to meet the Lord, to enter the ark. And in that period the Gospel will be spread to all nations, the last final appeal will be made. Just as Noah filled the huge ark, which could have saved so many people, with any animal willing to agree to come on board. The shutting of the door of the ark would then directly correspond with Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25: "The door was shut". Just as desperate people would've knocked on the shut door of the ark, so the unfaithful will knock on the door which the Lord has now closed. In this life we can knock on the closed door, recognizing our condemnation- and it will be opened (Lk. 11:7; Rev. 3:8). But after the Lord has 'come' in the sense of inviting us into the ark, to go forth and meet Him, the door will be shut.

Perhaps those seven days were a period of feasting in the world around Noah, just as there will be a brief period of hedonistic prosperity in the world before Christ's coming, perhaps because of some international agreement which offers prosperity to the entire planet in return for some nominal acceptance of false religion [Islam?]. We note the period of "seven days" used for funeral celebrations (Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13), wedding celebrations (Jud. 14:12,17) and general feasting (Esther 1:5; Job 1). The people around Noah were doing this right up until the last day of the seven days. Passover, a clear type of the final deliverance of God's people at the Lord's second coming, required a similar seven days preparation period (Ex. 12:19; 13:6) followed by a "day of the Lord", the actual feast, and "a solemn assembly" (Neh. 8:18). Indeed, the feasts of Yahweh all required a seven day period (Lev. 23), and each of them was in some way typical of the second coming.

A number of passages describe the AD70 judgments of Israel in terms of the flood; which suggests that they also have reference to the last days:

- 2 Peter 3 is a clear example, describing the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70 as being by fire as opposed to water used in Noah's time. Yet the chapter also has reference, e.g. through its links with the new Heavens and earth of Is. 65, with the destruction of the present age at the Lord's return.

- Nahum 1 describes the coming judgements on Israel in terms of mountains and hills splitting, and there being a great flood; all Genesis flood language.

- Dan. 9:26 describes the Romans in AD70 destroying "the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood", the LXX implying with a sudden flood, as in Noah's time.

- Is. 54:9 describes the judgments on Israel being "as the waters of Noah". The end of the flood, the end of Israel's judgments, therefore typifies the second coming.

- In the light of this the Lord's parable about the man building on sand whose house was destroyed when the heavy rain came (Mt. 7:25,27) must have primary reference (as so many of the parables do) to the

judgement on the Jewish house in AD70. Those who built on sand as a result of not hearing Christ's words were the Jews- also described as shoddy builders in Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Mic. 3:10; Jer. 22:13.

- The flood waters were upon the earth for 5 months. The siege of Jerusalem in AD70 lasted for the same period, coming after 3 years of the Roman campaign against Israel which started in AD67. The three and a half year suffering of Israel which culminated in AD70 may well point forward to a similar period in the last days; in which case the flood would typify the final months of that period, during which the judgments will be poured out most intensely. The five month tribulation of Rev. 9:10 may also have some relevance here.

Thus the state of Israel in AD70 was typified by the world of Noah's time, which therefore looks forward also to the last days, in the light of the evident connections between that period and our last days which are made in 2 Pet. 3 and the Olivet prophecy.

17:27 *They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all-* Lk. 21:34 is specific: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, so that day come upon you unawares". It could fairly be asked 'Why is there this warning, if the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted?'. This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. Of if "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

The flood "came", Gk. *erchomai*. This is effectively the same word as used about Noah "entering" or 'coming into' the ark (*eis-erchomai*). The coming of the flood represents the coming of Jesus to the world- *erchomai* is so often used in the context in that connection (Mt. 24:30,42,43,44,46,48; 25:6,10). The 'coming in' of Noah into the ark seven days before the flood (cp. the response of the faithful to the call to go out and meet the returning Lord Jesus) is essentially the coming of the Lord, even if His public 'coming' may be a few days after the 'coming' to the believers. Keil translates Dan. 9:26,27: "The city, together with the sanctuary, shall be destroyed by the people of the prince who shall come, who shall find his end in the flood; but war shall continue to the end, since destruction is irrevocably decreed. That prince shall force a strong

covenant for one week on the mass of the people, and during half a week he shall take away the service of sacrifice, and borne on the wings of idol abominations [cp. Ps. 18:10, where the true God is also borne on wings] shall carry on a desolating rule, till the firmly decreed judgment shall pour itself upon him as one desolated" (*Commentary* p. 373). Antichrist's destruction with *the* flood [note the definite article] comfortably connects with the Lord's usage of the flood as a symbol of the latter day judgment upon His enemies (Mt. 24:39). The person spoken about will be involved in war until the end of his days; he will die at the end of his military campaign against God's people. This was certainly not true of Titus in AD70.

In *Contra Celsum* we read Origen justifying the Christian church against Celsus' criticisms that it is a church of poor, simple people. That the majority of Christians would be poor and simple was indeed the expectation of both the Lord Jesus and Paul. Yet Origen seeks to justify the Christian church as middle class and respectable, with respected intellectuals amongst its membership. It was and is this desire to be seen as worldly-wise and 'normal' which is the death-knoll for any revival of Christianity. It was this which led to the acceptance of the Trinity; and it is this which robs true Christianity of its radical nature and appeal today. Perhaps in our last days this lesson needs to be learnt as never before. The Lord's picture of the world of the last days is of a household eating and drinking, absorbed with being normal (Mt. 24:38; Lk. 17:27). But the Lord's point is that this very 'normal' behaviour done in the wrong spirit is what He finds so wrong.

17:28 *Likewise even as it came to pass in the days of Lot- they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built-* There can be no doubt that the sexual aspects of Sodom's sins have great similarity to the moral filth of our present world. But significantly it was not this aspect which our Lord chose to highlight when speaking of how "the days of Lot" typified those of His return. Instead He spoke of those things which were more likely to ensnare His people: "*They* (as well as our present world) did eat, *they* drank, *they* bought, *they* sold, *they* planted, *they* built". Their obsession with daily activities without an awareness of God was as bad as their other sins; a point we would do well to be aware of. However, their eating and drinking must have been to gross excess- Ez. 16:49 defines "the iniquity of Sodom" as being "fullness of bread" among other things. Some lavish Christian lifestyles frequently feature "fullness of bread" - but because it is not perceived as a gross sin, this unhealthy similarity with Sodom slips by unchallenged. "They bought, they sold" suggests that Sodom was a major trading centre, rapidly increasing in wealth; "they planted, they built" implies a real boom town. Such success resulted in the people being proud and haughty (Ez. 16:49,50); the wealth created at the expense of others brought about "abundance of

idleness in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" (Ez. 16:49). It is these aspects of Sodom which are so precisely matched by our self-centred, money mad world. As our Lord realized, it is these aspects which are most likely to ensnare the child of God. Yet Sodom's people were not completely unaware of their religious conscience. Jeremiah likened the false prophets of Israel to the people of Sodom, who effectively taught that sin was service to God, (Jer. 23:14). This is another hint that the people of Sodom had some degree of responsibility, as have latter day Israel whom they typify.

Lot is presented here as representative of the latter-day believers. But he was hardly strong in faith. He chose to live in Sodom, first pitching his tent near it and then getting a house within the city and even becoming a judge. His wife was consumed in the materialism of the city as were most of his children. He argued with the Angel about leaving Sodom and was only saved by grace; and even after that, he slept with both his daughters whilst drunk. And yet he was counted as faithful. All the virgins in the parable slumber and sleep at the time their Lord comes; when clearly the last generation is exhorted not to slumber but to keep awake. We can conclude that the last days will be a time of spiritual weakness for the church.

*17:29 But in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all-* Lot in his last days in Sodom was a type of the believers living in the world at the time of the end. Lot in those last hours was walking around the streets of that city trying to save his family, walking amidst angry, blind people who hated him, drunk on their own lusts. Walking those streets must have been an uncanny experience. But that is God's picture of the world of our day, and our own uncanny, almost charmed life amongst the sleepwalkers. The whole human experience is analogous to sleepwalking; we go through the motions of reality, but actually (as a race) we are spiritually asleep. The world around us are sleepwalking, in God's eyes. And we too should share His perspective.

The Lord initially has in view that Jerusalem is as Sodom, an equation the Old Testament prophets make several times. The need to leave Sodom referred to the need to break with the temple cult, and the Olivet prophecy urges the faithful to flee out of Jerusalem to the mountains to avoid her judgment. This is the language of "Babylon" in Revelation, which in its primary application refers to the Jerusalem temple cult. All who remained in it would perish; hence the appeal of the letter to the Hebrews to leave it and resist the temptation to return to it.

*17:30 After the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of Man is revealed-* This commonly used phrase "Son of man" (Mt. 16:28; 24:27,30,39; 26:64) clearly quotes from Dan. 7:13: "One like the Son of

Man came with the clouds of heaven". This prophecy clearly speaks of the giving of the Kingdom to the Lord Jesus and His people at the end of the dominion of the fourth beast and its related horns. The prophecy could have been fulfilled in the first century- but it was rescheduled. This is another example of the conditionality in Daniel's prophecies which we discussed in an earlier digression. Dan. 7:13 speaks of how the Son of Man comes with the clouds of Heaven *before the Ancient of Days* and is given the Kingdom. What is in view is not so much the coming of Christ to earth but His coming to receive the Kingdom from the Father. Dan. 7:26,27: "The judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it to the end. The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole Heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him". "The Son of Man" is here interpreted as "the people of the saints of the Most High". The Son of Man, therefore, refers not just to the Lord personally but to all those in Him. Having chosen to go out to meet Him once they hear the trumpet call, they are snatched away to meet Him in the air and the Lord comes with them in judgment. This is the picture presented in 1 Thess. 4:16,17 and elsewhere. This is why His "coming" is parallel with a period of time, "the days of the son of man".

The Son of man will be "revealed"; and yet the other references to the Son of man being revealed refer to the way He is even now revealed to His true followers by the Father (Mt. 11:27; 16:17 etc.). At the second coming, the real nature of God's Son, the essence of His character, will be revealed to all. At the very time that the Wicked One will be revealed, so will the Son of God (2 Thess. 2:8). In the way God judges man, His character is again glorified and revealed; for in the way He judges, His essential characteristics are revealed. It is therefore possible to see anticipations of the day of future judgment in how God has judged in the past- thus incidents like Adam and Cain's rejection, the Babylonian and Roman invasions and the subsequent condemnation of God's people, the flood... all these are prototypes of the future judgment. Take, for example, the prophecy of Obadiah against Edom. It is full of language elsewhere used about the judgment seat.

17:31 *In that day, he that shall be on the housetop with his goods in the house-* The idea is that flight could be taken by jumping from housetop to housetop, without going back into the house. Escaping that way would best be done in any case without carrying anything. This is clearly language relevant specifically to first century Palestine, and is a parade example of how the prophecy was ideally intended for fulfilment then. The latter day fulfilment of these words will therefore only be in essence, rather than in detail. That is a principle we must bear in mind when considering many other Bible prophecies; the essence but not necessarily

the detail will be fulfilled in the rescheduled and delayed version of their fulfilment. The implication of the language here is that the sign to flee will be momentary; the signs are not, therefore, to be perceived over decades or even years, leading slowly towards the Lord's coming. Rather these signs, especially of the abomination, will appear suddenly, to the extent that the believer must flee immediately, quite literally without a moment to lose.

But this reflection leads us to wonder whether the fleeing away in a split second, be it from the field or housetop, is more likely a reference to the need to respond immediately to the call to leave secular life and go to meet the Lord. The example of a person in the field needing to leave immediately naturally connects with the words of :36 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". This would dovetail well with the implication elsewhere that the immediacy of our response to the knowledge that 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who themselves want to go to Him will be snatched away and meet Him, whilst those who delay will be rejected, as the foolish virgins who went first to buy oil.

*Let him not go down to take them away, and let him that is in the field likewise not return back-* See on Lk. 14:33. The allusion is clearly to Lot fleeing Sodom, also "to the mountains". This is a type of the response of the believers to the call to judgment at the Lord's return. If we don't separate from the world, we will share their judgment. The immediacy of response is so stressed, and will be ultimately indicative of where our heart is. Any desire to gather any material possessions will reveal that our heart is not wholly and solely with the Lord. All who love the Lord in spirit and in truth will respond to the sign or call to leave with immediacy.

Initially, it does not appear that there will be much compulsion to come to the judgment. After a meeting of the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17), both sheep and goats eventually appear before the judgment seat. When the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Mt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. "In that day" we will have the choice to go and take our goods from the house, or to go immediately with the Lord (Lk. 17:31). Under the law, the trumpet sounded and Israel had to gather themselves together (Num. 10:4); yet Paul says in Thessalonians that the Lord comes with a trumpet to gather His people together. If this is indeed based upon the Old Testament pattern, then there is an element of choice as to whether we gather ourselves unto Him- at least initially. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return "immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of

this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves. Our attitude in that split second is so vital. The rejected will mourn and wail, in anticipation of their future condemnation, when they see the sign of the Son of man indicating His imminent coming (Mt. 24:30,31). And this is why there is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo*- the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

The news that Joseph was alive and glorified was received rather like that of Christ's resurrection: initial disbelief, but then the family of Jacob who believed it rose up and left all they had to go to be with Joseph; Israel in AD70 and the last days are likewise bidden leave their stuff and go to be with Christ (Gen. 45:20 cp. Lk. 17:31).

17:32 *Remember Lot's wife!*- Lot seems to have gone to Sodom for material ends- our Lord holds up his wife as an example of those who love the materialism of this world more than the reality of his Kingdom. But the Angels speak of spiritually prepared people as being the only real possessions Lot had: "Whatever you have in the city, bring them out". "But his wife looked back from behind him" (Gen. 19:26) suggests the picture of the wife following behind Lot, filled with remorse at the loss of all she had held dear. Our Lord comments concerning not desiring our "stuff which is in the house" in the day of his coming: "Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever (like her) shall seek (Greek: 'plot') to save his life shall lose it". We can infer from this that she plotted and schemed how to save her possessions- i.e. her 'life', seeing that for her, her life did consist of the abundance of the things which she possessed (Lk. 12:15). These feelings grew so strong that she paused to take a loving, wistful look at the city. Remember that the fire only fell after Lot was in Zoar; therefore the city was looking as it normally did. Their exodus was at night- "the sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar" (Gen. 19:23), so she would have seen the flickering lights of the city in the distance. Compare this with how the virgins of Mt. 25 go out to meet their Lord at night.

"Remember Lot's wife" suggests that we should meditate upon her

position as it has especial warning for the last days. Her leaving of Sodom appears to have been due to the personal influence of Lot her husband, yet ultimately she failed to have that personal desire to obey God. It would not be pushing the type too far to suggest that the wives of latter day believers may feel that they can enter the Kingdom in the spiritual shadow of their husbands. One cannot help wondering whether she left Ur not through personal response to the promises but because the others were leaving. Doubtless her uncle Abraham would have led her and the whole family in regular prayer and meditation during the journey towards Canaan. But somehow the reality of the God of Israel was never allowed to touch her inner being, and the years of the soft life in Sodom would have sealed her spiritual state. It is hard to avoid making the point that many of us may be in a similar position. Gen. 19:14 RVmg. brings out the likely immediate background to her decision. Lot's sons in law "were to marry" his daughters. The Lord too perceived that they were marrying and giving in marriage the very day the flood came, and He pointed out the similarities with the Sodom situation (Lk. 17:27-29). Could it not be that the very day of the double wedding, they had to leave? With all the build up to the wedding, Lot and his wife would so wanted to have stayed just another day to see the wedding of their two daughters. It is to the girls credit that they both left. But Lot's wife had invested so much in it emotionally that she just had to look back.

*17:33 Whoever shall seek to gain his life shall lose it, but whoever shall lose it shall preserve it-* The Lord Jesus speaks of how a person can lose their place in the Kingdom as a person losing or forfeiting their own self; He was thereby teaching that a place in the Kingdom was possessing one's own real self (Lk. 9:25 RV). To lose life is paralleled with the Lord to unashamedly witnessing to Him in an unbelieving world; and He calls us each one to lose our lives in this way (Mk. 8:35).

The Lord had earlier taught in Mt. 10:28 that in the condemnation of the last day, it is God who will destroy [s.w. "lose"] life ["soul", s.w.]. But here the Lord says that a man will lose / destroy his own life if his life consists in what he owns (12:15) and seeks to save it. The point is that ultimately the condemned will have condemned themselves; the process of losing / destroying life is initiated and performed by people in this life, and the final condemnation is simply giving them what they themselves wished for. And the Lord goes further to say that whoever 'finds his life' will lose or destroy it (Mt. 10:39). To find life for ourselves, to think that by obtaining ['finding'] the world, the ideal life for ourselves, is to actually lose or destroy life. The Lord had earlier taught that He had not come to destroy [s.w. 'lose'] men's lives, but to save (Lk. 9:56). It is men who destroy / lose their own lives, they condemn themselves, rather than the Lord seeking to condemn them. The Father likewise has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. Rather does He simply confirm their own self-destruction. John's version of this saying about losing life is found in

the context of the Lord speaking to Himself about the need to die on the cross: "He that loves his life shall lose it" (Jn. 12:25). To avoid the cross is to love life- this fleeting life. Attitudes like 'Spoil yourself!', 'You deserve it!' and 'Have a fun time- you only live life once' are all examples of loving life rather than losing it in self-condemnation for the hope of the eternal life. And so Lk. 17:33 repeats the words, in the context of commenting upon Lot's wife- her wistful look back to Sodom was because that was her life, the life she had loved.

17:34 *I say to you: In that night there shall be two men in one bed. One shall be taken, and the other shall be left-* Not only is the city of Sodom representative of the world of the last days, but Lot's calling out of Sodom by the Angels is typical of our being 'taken' by Angels to meet the Lord. In that day, "One will be taken, whilst the other will be left [behind]" [Lk. 17:34]. The Greek for "taken" is the same as in Jn. 14:3- the Lord comes again to *take* us to be with Him. Seeing this passage also speaks of the second coming, it seems to fit more logically that the faithful are taken away; and the rejected 'left behind'. The Greek word for "left" really has the idea 'sent away'. Whilst it's not the same Greek word, it is the same *idea* as in several pictures of the judgment- the rejected are 'sent away'; the idea of being 'left sitting' doesn't seem to be there. So in the very moment of the Lord's return, the essential division is made; the faithful are taken, whilst the rejected are "left", but their being "left [behind]" is actually their condemnation, their being sent away from the Lord.

17:35 *There shall be two women grinding together at the mill; one shall be taken and the other shall be left-* The present tense is used here: "One is taken, the other is left". Perhaps this was to heighten our sense that the essence of judgment is now; the call of the Gospel is a call to journey to judgment day. So much of the Lord's teaching sensitively gives examples including men, and then including women. He was so very far ahead of His time in being so gender inclusive. They were grinding using millstones, which are always used in the Bible as symbolic of condemnation. These people were working out their own condemnation. Perhaps the idea is that one [the responsible] would be taken away to destruction, the other [not responsible to Divine judgment] would be "left".

17:36 *There shall be two men in the field; one shall be taken and the other shall be left-* I suggested on :34 that the taking away is to salvation and those left behind are destroyed with the world, after the pattern of Lot being saved and his family destroyed. But a case can be made the other way around. The 'taking away' is in judgment / condemnation / destruction, just as the unbelieving world were 'taken away' (Mt. 24:39). The ambiguity in interpretation is intentional. For we are to reflect that we shall be taken or left, and to where shall we be taken, and for what shall we be left. "Left" in the Greek has a wide range of possible meanings

here- the word is translated 'forgiven', 'sent away', and perhaps there is here the hint that they will be preserved to hear the Gospel of the Kingdom. In this sense we must remember the Lord's definition that "the field is the word" (Mt. 13:38). And in the Olivet prophecy He has foreseen that the faithful who are called away will be "in the field" (Mt. 24:18). The parable of the prodigal son likewise features the two sons, both in a field (Lk. 15:15,25 s.w.). The prodigal leaves the field and goes to the Father. The older son refuses to ultimately leave the field and go in to the Father. Legalism and judgmentalism is therefore quite enough to warrant being 'taken away' to condemnation. See on 1 Thess. 4:15.

*17:37 And they answered and said to him: Where, Lord? And he said to them: Where the body is, there will also the eagles gather together-* God sometimes uses language in a way which we may find embarrassing or inappropriate, reading from the distance of our age and culture, where there is an awkwardness at talking about the raw side of human nature. Thus when creating a mini-parable to explain the gathering of the responsible to him at the second coming, Jesus likens himself to a rotting carcass which will instinctively attract the eagles, representing the responsible. One of the well known shames of crucifixion was that the body was pecked by birds, even before death occurred. The idea of an uncovered body attracting birds (i.e. the believers) would have been readily understood as a crucifixion allusion. But within our use of language, it seems inappropriate to liken the Lord Jesus Christ to a decaying carcass. It seems similarly inappropriate to liken God's response to our prayers to an unjust judge who grudgingly answers requests (Lk. 18:1-7), or to repeatedly compare Jesus to a thief (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,33; 1 Thess. 5:2-4; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). It seems out of place to liken believers struggling to enter the Kingdom to violent people trying to storm a city by force (Mt. 11:12). The absentee landlords of Galilee were despised by all; and yet the Lord uses one of them as a figure for Himself (Lk. 20:9). Most stunning of all is Psalm 78:36,65,66: "They (Israel) did flatter Him (God) with their mouth... then the Lord awaked... like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts". This just isn't what we expect; to read about God being flattered by foolish men, and for Him to be likened to a drunken soldier who goes on the rampage kicking others in their private parts (this is alluding back to 1 Sam. 5:9). And the Lord likens His final appeal to Israel to casting dung around them (Lk. 13:8).

This whole verse has various possible interpretations which each seem to me to have things to commend them and yet also their own problems. This verse is an expansion upon the Lord's teaching that His coming will be visible, will be as the lightning of judgment upon those who have not "gone forth" to Him, and no credence should be given to any claims He has come invisibly. The Lord may be likening His coming to the coming

down from the sky of eagles upon the carcass- of Israel. This could have had an AD70 fulfilment in the 'eagles' of the Roman legions, just as Yahweh's Old Testament 'comings' in judgment upon Israel were at the hands of the Babylonian and Assyrian armies. But the final coming of Divine judgment will be in the literal, personal coming of God's Son to earth in judgment. The same Greek word translated "where" is found in Mk. 13:14- the abomination of desolation will stand "*where* it ought not". It could be that this location on the temple mount is what the Lord has in view. This is where He will come down in judgment. Upon the very location He was then standing upon with the disciples, the pride and glory of an apostate Judaism. It was already no more than a carcass in God's eyes. The temple was "where [s.w.] the Jews always resort" (Jn. 18:20). The carcass or dead body may not necessarily refer to Israel. In Rev. 11:8,9 we find the same Greek word used about the dead bodies of the faithful remnant who share their Lord's death in Jerusalem and lay exposed for three days- perhaps literal days. The metaphor of the eagles coming speaks of Divine judgment from Heaven, ultimately in the personal coming of Christ to earth. In this case, the eagles would come because of the dead bodies / carcass of those who had died the death of Christ in Jerusalem in the final tribulation. The Greek word for "carcass", *stoma*, literally means 'a fallen one', and is from the verb *pipto*, to fall. And this word is used about the fall of Jerusalem- also in Revelation 11. The city "fell" (Rev. 11:13), just as Jerusalem was to "fall by the edge of the sword" (Lk. 21:24).

It's possible that the Lord intended us to understand the carcass as Jerusalem, and the vultures as the latter day invaders of Israel (Jer. 4:13). Or it has been suggested by Harry Whittaker that "If you (my disciples) show yourselves to be spiritually a carcass (as in Rev. 3:1), you will certainly find yourselves the prey of these "vultures," the false teachers". "Where, Lord?" may not necessarily mean 'to where'. That the Roman invasion of AD67-70 was a detailed fulfilment of some parts of the Mosaic prophecies of curses for disobedience is well known and chronicled; here the quotation would be from Dt. 28:26 "your carcasses shall be meat unto the fowls of the air".

So this may refer to the coming of Christ down from Heaven in judgment upon either the carcass of Israel, or for the sake of the carcasses of the slain believers. The Greek for "eagle", *aetos*, literally means 'one of the air [*aer*]', and *aer* is used of how the Lord Jesus will come in the "air" [*aer*] with the faithful in judgment (1 Thess. 4:17). This would be the pouring out of the seventh vial into "the air" [*aer*], when finally "It is done" (Rev. 16:17). Yet here in Lk. 17:37 the Lord speaks of the gathering of the eagles in terms of explaining how His people will be gathered to Him and judgment. The same word for 'gather' is used repeatedly for the gathering of the faithful in the last days (Mt. 3:12; 13:30; 25:26,32; Jn. 15:6). Most notably, we find it used in 1 Thess.

4:14, comforting the believers that God will at the last day 'gather' the dead believers at the last day (AV "will God *bring* with Him"). This will be the "gathering together unto Him" (2 Thess. 2:1 s.w.). This is all impressive evidence that the language of 'gathering' is used about the gathering of the believers to Christ at His coming, and according to 1 Thess. 4:16,17 this will involve a literal being snatched away [from persecution, according to the Olivet prophecy]. Just as the believers will be led / gathered to human judgment seats (Mk. 13:11, *ago*), gathered / lead / brought [*ago*] before human kings (Lk. 21:12), so they will be gathered to the judgment seat of Christ the King [*sun-ago*].

The Lord responds to the question about how we will get to judgment by saying that eagles fly to where the body is. It's possible to interpret eagles as Angels- e.g. Rev. 8:13 speaks of an Angel flying through the sky in the last day, crying 'woe'- the Greek *ouai* would've been understood as an imitation of the noise an eagle makes. And there are other links between Rev. 8 and Mt. 24. So perhaps the Lord's answer was that we are not to worry about getting there, as our Angels will take us to judgment. Zech. 14:5 speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus "and all the holy ones with him". But it is applied to the believers in 1 Thess. 3:13 and to the Angels in 2 Thess. 1:7. In this sense, the believers come with their Angels to judgment; but because the process happens in a moment of time, it appears that in fact Jesus returns with the faithful. This is why elsewhere the Lord Jesus is described as returning both with Angels (Mt. 16:27; 25:31; Lk. 9:26) and with the saints (Rev. 19:14 cp. 17:14).

And yet the Lord may simply be saying that questions like 'Where?' and 'When?' are irrelevant. We shall be taken to judgment just as eagles find their way to the carcass, but we are to ensure that we are not that dead carcass.

## CHAPTER 18

18:1 *And he spoke a parable to them, that they should always pray and not lose heart, saying-* This comes straight after the teaching in chapter 17 about readiness for the Lord's coming; and continued, intense prayer is part of that preparedness. There are so many allusions by Paul to this verse and the ensuing parable. This shows just how like us Paul was; he had his favourite parables, one or two that really stuck in his mind, just as we do. And he alluded to them! They were in his heart, to inspire and motivate him, just as the Lord intended. Paul picks up the idea of not fainting in 2 Thess. 3:13: "Brethren, be not weary (s.w. "not to faint") in well doing". What well-doing did Paul have in mind? Attending the Sunday meetings? Being patient with some difficult sister in the ecclesia? The connection with Lk. 18:1 tells us what he had in mind: keep on praying intensely. It's no co-incidence that Paul started that section of 2 Thess. 3 (in v.1) with the exhortation: "Brethren, pray for us". And he concludes it with the same rubric: "Brethren, be not weary" (faint not), in your prayers. He knew from the parable that repeated prayer was powerful. And so he asks them to keep at it for him, because he needed it. Perhaps Paul had the same thing in mind when he wrote to the Ephesians (3:13): "In (Christ) we have boldness and access with confidence (to God, in prayer, cp. Heb. 4:16)... *wherefore* I desire that you faint not (s.w. Lk. 18:1) at my tribulations"; is he not implying 'You know how powerful prayer is, so don't faint in it, you know what struggles I'm having, *please* keep on praying for me, like that persistent widow in the parable'. This fits in with a number of other passages in which Paul unashamedly begs his brethren to pray for him. In this we see his humility, his high regard for other brethren who were almost certainly weaker than him, and also the physical desperation of his daily life.

18:2 *There was in a city a judge, who did not fear God and had no regard for man-* The judge, representing God, lived in the same city as the widow, representing us (:3). The Kingdom of God is likened to a city which we are to enter. We are in a sense within it now, having entered through the narrow gate. The unjustness of the judge is setting up the final point of this parable; the end stress of the parable is that if this is how an unjust judge acts, then how much more sensitive is God to our cries for justice. But we are to note that Israel were commended to appoint judges who feared God (Ex. 18:21). The existence in Israel of judges who did not fear God was therefore a criticism of Israel as a whole. The judge did not "regard" man; the word means to respect to the point of reverence (s.w. 20:13; Mt. 21:37; Heb. 12:9). The implication is that God so respects us, that He, unlike this judge, is eager to hear our prayers. And we are to respect others likewise; the implication here is that if we fear / respect God, we will respect men who are made in His image. And disrespect of human persons is thereby disrespect of God.

18:3 *And there was a widow in that city; and she came often to him, saying: Give me justice against my adversary-* Note the Psalmists' joy that judgment is coming (Ps. 67:4; 96:12,13). The same spirit can be seen in the parable of the woman who keeps begging the unjust judge to open her case. She may have had her little piece of land taken away from her, whatever it was, she is confident she has a watertight case and this is why she so pesters the judge to judge her (Lk. 18:1-5). Now this is a powerful challenge to those believers who seem to *fear* the judgment process. David shows the same spirit in asking God to 'avenge my cause' (Ps. 35:23). There is the same confidence that by grace, he is in the right and longs for justice to be done. So much of Romans is dedicated to the images of the court room; we are justified, and we should be earnestly seeking the vindication of Spirit against flesh.

The parable speaks especially of faith in prayer in the last days before the Lord's coming (:7,8). The implication is that the woman, the church, is under persecution from a great satan / adversary; and her earnest prayers will elicit God's dramatic judgment and intervention in this earth. This is all very much the language of the book of Revelation.

Much of the pain felt by the spiritually abused focuses upon the issue of injustice. They were treated like *this*, but others are treated like *that*; *you* can't break bread in a church, but *he* can; *she* isn't allowed to attend the gathering but *he* is, and so forth. The Lord told a parable about a woman who repeatedly asked for 'justice', with the implication that she would only eventually find it at the Lord's return. But He went straight on to tell another parable, about the repentant man who beat upon his breast saying "God have mercy upon me, the sinner"; this man "went down to his house *justified*". The theme of 'justification' is thus a thread which continues from the woman demanding 'justification' (Gk.) against her abuser (Lk. 18:3). The Lord's point wasn't merely that justice will only be ultimately done at His return; but further, that we are all serious sinners, who have been 'justified' by God's grace; and this colossal-scale experience of receiving undeserved justice / justification should mean that we're not so concerned about receiving justice in human matters in this life. There cannot be perfection this side of God's Kingdom being established upon earth. To seek for perfection in relationships is perhaps reflective of a lack of faith or understanding relating to the Kingdom of perfection which is yet to come. One of the greatest things for me about that Kingdom is the unity and perfection of relationships which there will then be. It is, however, all so hard because the New Testament presents how the church should be- an ideal of loving, sensitive, caring relationships in the spirit of Christ. And this is very attractive to us. It's very hard, therefore, to face the reality that this great intention, this lofty possibility, has actually been left unachieved by the church. It's like reading the descriptions of God's house in Ezekiel 40-48. This wonderful temple could've come about in Ezekiel's time. The possibilities are given

in such great detail- but their fulfilment was quite simply dependent upon whether Judah wished to make it come real by living up to it (Ez. 43:10-12). And they chose not to. It's the same with the ideal "house of God" presented to us in the New Testament. Those who tend towards perfectionism find this very hard to cope with. It is indeed a tragedy, that so much Divine potential is as it were wasted, not realized, by our dysfunction. But none of this should take away from the personal reality of salvation and relationship with God which we each have. This is not to say that exposing abuse and dealing with it shouldn't happen. It should. But let's not feel that if justice isn't done, we are somehow without justice. We are the ultimately justified, and our standing before God's judgment seat is far more significant than our standing before that of mere humans.

First century Palestinian peasant courts have been described in some detail. They involved a mass of men shouting at the judge, who usually decided cases according to who gave the largest bribe. Women never went to court. It was a man's world there. This woman had no male in her extended family to speak for her. She had no money to pay a bribe. But still she went to court and sought to persuade the judge. In this element of unreality we see the bravery of prayer, the height of the challenge; that we who have nothing and no human chance of being heard, will indeed be heard. It would've struck the initial peasant hearers of the story as strange that above all the male shouting, somehow this heroic woman was heard- and was heard repeatedly. Again, we see an encouragement to prayer. And to liken powerful praying to a woman was in itself unusual in that male dominated age.

*18:4 And for a while he would not, but afterward he said to himself: Though I neither fear God, nor regard man-* The idea is that eventually there is response even from one who has no sensitivity to people nor fear of God; and how much more quickly and deeply will come the response from the just judge of all, who does "regard man" with great pity (Ps. 144:3).

*18:5 Yet because this widow troubles me, I will give her justice, lest she wear me out by her continual coming-* The connection is perhaps with the man of the parable in Lk. 11:8, who was so bold and confident in his request that he shamelessly 'troubled' the rich man to give him his request; and this too was explaining our confidence in prayer to the Father.

The widow by her continual coming in prayer 'wearied' the judge into responding; Strong defines this Greek word as meaning 'to beat and black and blue' (RVmg. gives "bruise"). It's a strange way of putting it, but this is another reminder of the intense struggle of prayer. Jacob's wrestling with the Angel was really a clinging on to him, pleading with tears for the

blessing of forgiveness; and in this he was our example (Hos. 12:4-6). Lk. 21:36 RV speaks of the believer 'prevailing' with God in prayer. Our prayers are to give the Father no "rest" (Is. 62:7), no cessation from violent warfare (Strong). See on Col. 2:1. Again, the idea is that if the unjust judge is so sensitive to this woman's words, to the point he feels beaten up by them- how much more sensitive is the Father to our prayers!

The parable of the widow who keeps nagging the free-wheeling judge is rather humanly unlikely. Would such a tough guy really pay attention to the repeated requests of the woman? But although he considers himself independent of both God and men, he ends up being controlled by the widow. This reflects the immense power which there is in human prayer, and God's willingness to respond if we are importunate enough.

18:6 *And the Lord said: Hear what the unrighteous judge says-* Perhaps the fact the ungodly judge is worn out by the woman's requests is the element of unreality in the story; for usually, if she paid no bribe, she would not even get a hearing, let alone be repeatedly listened to. And it flags up the essential point of the parable, which is that God will be even more sensitive to us. The emphasis is on the word "unrighteous". The *righteous* judge is going to be even more sensitive and quicker to respond than the unrighteous judge. The justice of God as judge is emphasized throughout the Old Testament, and the Lord describes Himself likewise as a just judge who responds to what He hears [rather than to bribes or pressure from others in human society, Jn. 5:30].

18:7 *And shall not God give justice to His chosen, who cry to Him day and night?-* The unjust judge was worn down by the woman's repeated appeals. The implication is that God is far more sensitive and will therefore respond quicker. Even though His response may appear slow, compared to the magnitude of our request, His response is quick.

18:7- see on 2 Pet. 3:9.

The many connections between Revelation and the Gospels need to be followed up; the incidents in Christ's earthly experience seem to be woven by him into the fabric of the visions he gives John. The theme of persecution is especially common. The widow crying to God because of persecution represents the prayers of the "elect" or "chosen" remnant of the last days (Lk. 18:7 cp. Mk. 13:20). They will be asking for vengeance against the beast which is persecuting them, and thus this parable is the basis for the souls under the altar crying out for vengeance (Rev. 6:9). Christ's return is therefore the day of vengeance (Lk. 21:22; Is. 34:8; 61:2; 63:4) of his persecuted latter day ecclesia. Despite the power of prayer in bringing about the Lord's return in vengeance, Lk. 18:9-14 continues in this same context to warn that despite this:

- Perhaps the Lord won't find such faith in prayer when he returns

- Many will pray but be so sure of their own righteousness that their prayers are hindered
  - The disciples will tend to despise the little ones in the ecclesia.
- All these are latter day problems: abuse of "the little ones", self-righteousness and lack of real faith in prayer.

*Will He be slow to help them?*- God *will* shorten the period of time of trouble before His return (2 Pet. 3:9); and we read that He *will* also lengthen the period of grace (Lk. 13:6-9)... *if* His people ask Him. What He 'will' do perhaps should be read as what He *can* do. And this is why so much prophecy is conditional. Significantly, no other religion that I know contains this feature- of a God so passionate and so real that He will change His stated will and intention for the sake of His people's prayers.

The AV "though he bear long with them" is accurate. 2 Pet. 3:9 uses the same word in teaching that "The Lord... is longsuffering to us-ward" (AV) of the last days. This longsuffering of Jesus spoken of by Peter alludes to this parable of the persistent widow, whose continued requests should match our prayers for the second coming (the vengeance of our adversaries which she requested will only come then). "Though he bear long" (s.w. 'longsuffering') with us, "God shall avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him" (Lk. 18:7 AV). The "us" whom Peter refers to as experiencing the Lord's longsuffering ('bearing long') are therefore to be equated with "the elect" in their fervent prayers for the second coming. The days being shortened for the elect's sake therefore refers to the hastening of the second coming on account of the elect's prayers (Mt. 24:22). In view of the later references to Mt. 24, it is not unreasonable to think that Peter is consciously alluding to Mt. 24:22 concerning the shortening of the days for the sake of the elect's prayers, through his allusion to the parable of the persistent widow of Lk. 18:7.

18:8 *I say to you, that He will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?*-

"Nevertheless", despite the fact God answers prayer, being far more sensitive to our cries than the unjust judge- it is still a question as to whether there will be faith in prayer in the last days, at the Son of Man's coming. Whilst the article is indeed used, "*the faith*" doesn't have to mean 'the set of doctrines which comprise the one faith'. It may refer to that, but the article may be used here simply for emphasis. Will He find faith, *the* kind of faith which there ought to be given His sensitivity to us? The implication is that the experience of answered prayer *ought* to develop faith, but such will be the spiritual perils of the last days and the lack of serious prayer, that there may well be no faith in the final generation. Lot has just been cited in chapter 17 as an example of the latter day believers- and he was weak in faith, although saved. Likewise even the five wise virgins of the parable are sleeping when they ought to have stayed awake for their Lord's return.

The theme of prayer continues. Despite the power of prayer in bringing about the Lord's return in vengeance, Lk. 18:9-14 continues in this same context to warn that despite this:

- Perhaps the Lord won't find such faith in prayer when he returns
- Many will pray but be so sure of their own righteousness that their prayers are hindered
- The disciples will tend to despise the little ones in the ecclesia.

*May we not give way to these latter day temptations!*

There is the real possibility that when Christ returns, none will hold the faith. Only eight people were truly watching when the flood came; and Peter cites this as an example for us at the time of Christ's return. No wonder there is such emphasis upon the need to watch. If we are the generation which will see Christ's appearing, we will be the only people who never physically die. And we will be those who welcome the Lord Jesus to this earth, who stand ready to welcome Him. This is an honour higher than we probably appreciate. No wonder there is this pressing need in these last days to watch our doctrine, our way of life, *to hold on* to the great salvation which we have been given in prospect.

*18:9 And he spoke also this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt-* The theme continues from the previous parable. There, the woman [representing us] prays for justice. "Justice" and "righteousness" are connected ideas in Hebrew and Greek thought. The woman wanted justice / righteousness; but she did not have it of herself. It had to be granted by a judge, and we are in relationship with the just judge, who alone gives justice / righteousness. Those who think they are righteous of themselves do not therefore fear God and they therefore despise men, just as the unjust judge did. The Pharisee who "treated others with contempt" therefore equates with the unjust judge of whom we have just read; and the woman desperately begging for justice is the tax collector begging for forgiveness, for rightness with God, who goes down to his house justified, with justice / righteousness, just as the widow went away with justice.

Paul alludes here when he says that the sentence of death we have within our bodies requires a bodily resurrection and transformation of the body far beyond our power to achieve; and therefore we cannot trust in ourselves, i.e. our own righteousness (2 Cor. 1:9). Rather must we cast ourselves upon God's grace.

The Lord was "despised", the same word here translated 'to treat with contempt' (23:11; Acts 4:11). Those despised by religionists are fellowshiping their Lord's sufferings; and the religionists by doing so are taking the side of His abusers.

*18:10 Two men went into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector-* Many of the parables feature two people; the self-

righteous, and the serious sinner. One saved, the other lost. The parable of the older and younger sons in chapter 15 is a clear example. We have it again here. If we don't identify with the serious sinner- then we have to identify with the self-righteous.

18:11 *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus-* AV "Prayed thus with himself". The OT idiom of prayer 'returning into one's own bosom' is surely the quarry from which the Lord dug His image of a man praying *with himself*. It isn't real prayer; it's one part of the brain talking to a black box in another part of the brain, that we call 'God'.

*God, I thank you that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector-* Luke uses the same term in recording how "the rest of men" would seek and find the Lord (Acts 15:17). Those despised as secular, non-religious and the hopeless sinners are the very ones whom the Lord came to save; rather than the self-righteous religionists. And these are the ones we should be reaching out to, rather than attempting to convert religionists from one flavour to another. The same word for "rest" has just been used in :9 for how the Pharisee despised "others". It means to put down, to set at nothing; and this is how the tax collector, and those in his category, are made to feel by the self-righteous. It's a big reason why secular folk who are searching for God won't attend church.

"Or even as" could as well be translated to the effect that "this tax collector" was the epitome of an extortioner, unjust and adulterer. And his deep penitence could suggest there might have been some truth in that accusation. But he, the "unjust", was the one who went away "justified" (:14). Luke was personal friends with Paul, and it could be argued that his Gospel record was preparation for Paul's later theological writings. The idea of the unjust being justified by faith through grace is exactly the theme of Paul in Romans and elsewhere.

18:12 *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I get-* Fasting was only required by the Law on the day of Atonement; and tithing was only of cattle and agricultural produce. Obedience to law, and even exceeding legal requirements, was not the basis for justification; for it is the hopeless sinner who goes away justified (:14); as noted on :11, Luke seems to be preparing the way for Paul's later expositions on justification of sinners by faith and not legal obedience.

18:13 *But the tax collector, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast, saying: God, be merciful to me, the sinner-* Ps. 51:1 "Have mercy on me, O God..." is quoted by the publican in Lk. 18:13. He felt that David's prayer and situation was to be his. And he is held up as the example for each of us. In Romans 4, Paul quotes David's sin with Bathsheba as our pattern. We along with all the righteous ought to "shout for joy" that David really was forgiven (Ps.

32:11)- for there is such hope for *us* now. David is our example, and yet therefore the intensity of David's repentance must be ours. He hung his head as one in whose mouth there were no more arguments, hoping only in the Lord's grace (Ps. 38:14 RVmg.). Paul alludes here and sees this man as himself (1 Tim. 1:15,16). See on Lk. 23:48.

Usually men prayed with hands crossed over their chest. But men even at funerals don't usually beat upon their breast: "The remarkable feature of this particular gesture is the fact that it is characteristic of women, not men". The man was quite exceptionally upset and in grief- because of his sins. Beating his breast suggested a blow to his heart, as if confessing himself worthy of death. And personal recognition of private sin wasn't a big feature of first century life. The Lord's initial audience would've been amazed at the contrition and grief which this man had because of his secret sins; and this is the lesson for us. The times of prayer in the temple coincided with the offering of the daily sacrifices. The man asks for God to 'have mercy on me' (Lk. 18:13). But he uses a different word to that in Lk. 18:38, where the same translation commonly occurs. *Hilastheti moi*, he says; and the noun occurs only in Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10 to describe the atonement sacrifice. It seems the man was so extraordinarily moved by his own sin and the sacrifice offered. No wonder the same phrase occurs in Lk. 23:48 about people likewise beating their breasts in repentance when they saw the actual sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The humble man "smote his breast, saying, God, be *merciful* to me a sinner". "Be merciful" translates the word elsewhere translated "make propitiation", in describing the atoning death of Jesus on the cross (Heb. 2:17). The man's sinfulness drove him to plead for the cross: 'Please God, make a propitiation for me' was his plea. He realized his need for the cross. And we should look back at the cross and feel and know the same need... According to the Lord's own teaching, there are in some ways only two types of believer: either we are the self-righteous Pharisee, or the publican who beats his breast in self-loathing, hating his corrupt heart, begging for "mercy" [Gk. propitiation], confessing that he is *the* sinner (Lk. 18:13 Gk.). Paul, in one of his many allusions to the Gospels, reached the same height of contrition when he said, in total honesty, that he was "[the] chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15,16). James 4:9 tells some believers in the Jerusalem ecclesia that their joy ought to be turned to heaviness, implying the downcast look of the publican who could not so much as lift up his eyes to God. This man is held up by the Lord and James as some kind of hero and example to us.

The man who 'humbled himself' smote upon his breast in knowledge of his own sin and his Lord's grace. The Greek phrase occurs elsewhere only once, again in Luke's thought, in describing how those humbled by the vision of the cross beat upon their breasts (Lk. 23:48)- surely in

recognition of their sin and contrition before the grace of God outpoured. In the cross, we see self-humbling that we might be exalted. And we respond by likewise humbling ourselves, that others may be exalted.

18:14 *I say to you, this man went home rendered righteous rather than the other. For everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled, but he that humbles himself shall be exalted-* This is alluded to in 2 Cor. 11:7. Paul told Corinth that he had abased himself so that *they* might be exalted, so that they could share the exaltation he would receive on account of his humility. In all this, of course, he reflected to his brethren the very essence of the attitude of the Lord Jesus for toward us. It was through refusing funding for his work from the Corinthians that he *abased* himself that they might be *exalted-* all language of the crucifixion (cp. Phil. 2:8,9). Thus his refusing of legitimate help to make his way easier was an enactment in himself of the cross. We live in a world which has made the fulfilment of personal aims of paramount importance. It has affected the fabric of every society, and become embedded in every mind. To *live to serve*, to put oneself down that others may rise... this is strange indeed. John the Baptist had this spirit, for he rejoiced that he decreased whilst the Lord's cause increased. Paul likewise abased himself that others might be exalted, after the pattern of the cross. God's gentleness, His humility / bowing down (Heb.) has made us great, lifted us up (Ps. 18:35). And we respond to it by humbling *ourselves*.

So we are taught here that he who humbles himself in prayer will be exalted. Paul perhaps had this in mind when he spoke of how the Lord Jesus on the cross humbled Himself that He might be exalted (Phil. 2). Real prayer is a humiliating experience, a true humbling of self after the pattern of the Lord's crucifixion. We really need to ask ourselves whether this is anywhere near true of our prayer life.

To come before "the throne of grace" is to come in essence before the judgment and before the cross of our Lord. Inevitably these things convict us of our desperation. The publican who beat upon his breast "went down to his house justified". Yet we were justified by the shedding of the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9). That man's faith was consciously focused upon the Lord's sacrifice. We believe on Him who justifies us, through the blood of the cross (Rom. 4:5), and this faith is manifested through focusing upon the cross, and expressing it in prayer to be justified. The publican went home after prayer "justified rather than the other". It has been suggested that this reflects "a Semitic idiom which describes... an anticipation of his acquittal in the final judgment".

The language of justification ["rendered righteous"] as noted on :11 and :12 is preparing the way for Paul's inspired expansion of these ideas in Romans.

18:15 *And they were bringing to him even their babies, that he should touch them-* His blessing was and is mediated without physical contact. The need for physical contact in order to receive blessing was embedded in the religious mentality of the time, and is seen to this day in so many rituals and traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The sick woman thought to herself that if she could only *touch* Jesus, she would be made whole; but He responded that He made her whole because of *her faith* (Mt. 9:21,22). He was gently correcting her mistaken understanding of the power of touch. And yet the Lord made a concession to this misunderstanding by indeed touching the children as requested.

The touching was understood as a form of blessing. The implication is that the Lord agrees to the request, blessing little ones for the sake of the efforts of third parties who bring them to Him (as in Mk. 2:5 and so often in the work of saving and curing men). As the children 'received' this blessing, so the Lord urges the disciples to 'receive' the things of the Kingdom- for Mk. 10:15 records the Lord's further comment that "whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". Those children receiving His grace and blessing, all the more gracious because they received it thanks to others bringing them to it, represent each disciple who receives the grace and blessing of the Kingdom.

*But when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them-* Just as they had turned away the little one in Matthew 18, as they sought to send away the hungry crowds, forbad John's disciples and tried to turn away the Syro-Phoenician woman. And they did this despite the Lord's sober warning that turning away little ones is making them stumble, and will lead to eternal rejection from God's Kingdom. The disciples in their preaching, of which the Gospels are transcripts, were stressing how they had so failed to grasp this vital teaching.

18:16 *But Jesus called them to him, saying: Permit the little children to come to me, and do not forbid them. For to such belongs the kingdom of God-* The Lord rebuked the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uttermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this

kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow 'little ones' to the Lord's table.

18:17 *Truly I say to you, Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it-* 'Be babes' Peter later exhorted, 'and grow as they do' (1 Pet. 2:2). The same word occurs here in Lk. 18:15 in description of the "infants" whom Peter rebuked. The Lord's response had been to tell Peter to be like them. And, having been humbled into learning something of a child's teachableness, a babe's desire for the sincere milk, Peter now asks others to learn the lesson.

The idea of "receiving" is often used about people accepting the Gospel. The implication is that one can receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of God- and yet not enter it, because we didn't receive it as a child. We didn't accept that we are the 'little ones', accepting we know so little, and just marvelling at the special grace being shown us which we accept in awed wonder. The language of 'entering the Kingdom' is used both of our final entry into the Kingdom when Christ returns (Mt.25:10,21; Jn. 3:5), and of our current entering the Kingdom. The rich man can enter the Kingdom right now if he sheds the load of his wealth (Mt. 19:23,24). The Scribes stopped and hindered those who were entering the Kingdom from entering, locking the door through which the Kingdom could now be entered, all because they chose not to enter themselves (Mt. 23:13; Lk. 11:52). So it's a case of 'Now but not yet'. We do *now* enter into God's rest, and yet we are promised that we *will* enter that rest at Christ's return (Heb. 4:1-11). The Lord had warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes, or we will likewise not enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20); but that righteousness is in accepting the blessing of righteousness as a little child; for without *that* we shall not enter the kingdom. Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21)- and that will is to be as little children and accept gifts without seeking to justify ourselves or earn them.

We will enter the Kingdom as shy children. It doesn't just mean that we must *now* be as little children, but more that we will enter the Kingdom as little children. For Jesus had just said that "of such is the Kingdom". Children unspoilt by the hardness of this world and this flesh... this is how we will be as we walk away from the judgment seat into the Kingdom. And we should live the Kingdom life now. See on Lk. 12:37.

The Lord perceived spiritual prompts in the ordinary things of everyday life. He saw in those children the qualities of those who would be in His Kingdom. Those kids weren't 'spiritual' in themselves. They were just Palestinian kids with well meaning, superstitious mums who believed in the power of the touch of the holy man. Yet, the Lord explained, that was no reason to disregard them. They should be seen as reminders of

spiritual qualities which should be in us all. And this was how He perceived everything in His daily round of life. He raised everything to an altogether higher level.

18:18 *And a certain ruler asked him, saying: Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*- Mark adds that he came running to Him and kneeled before Him. The idea was: 'Give me a list of dos and don'ts, I'm game'. But the answer was ultimately: "Follow me" (:22)- 'don't worry about specifics, but have a spirit of life committed to following Me, bearing My cross'. For that is reward enough. Likewise Peter was interested in what the reward would be for having given things up for the Lord; and the final answer is really 'I'm going to die on the cross- please share that death with me' (Lk. 18:28-33 and parallels).

The man was clearly influenced by the Jewish idea that one supreme good deed could assure the doer of salvation. This was particularly popular amongst the zealots, who considered that suicidal attacks on the Romans could assure them of salvation; the same mentality is to be found in Islamic suicide bombers today. But in His typical manner, the Lord doesn't address the misunderstanding but rather works with it. He ends up telling the man that if he sells all he has and gives to the poor, then he will have "treasure in Heaven" (:22). This, therefore, isn't a global command to every Christian. It was designed especially for this young man who thought that just one great act of obedience would secure salvation. The Lord went along with this by giving him such an example; but added: "And come and follow Me", thus gently correcting the idea that one great act is enough for salvation.

Rom. 7:19 is Paul's allusion here, where he laments that like the young man, the good that he would do [same Greek words "shall I do"] he finds himself unable to do because of the sin that dwells within him. But instead of walking away from the Lord as this man did, Paul threw himself upon the Lord's grace. This zealous young man was also understood by Peter as representative of us all; for he clearly alludes to him in 1 Pet. 3:10,11: "He who would love life and see good days [cp. the young man wanting to "have eternal life"]... let him... do good" (same Greek words).

Mk. 10:17 notes that he also asked what he must do to "inherit" eternal life, as if he considered eternity a right that he must receive if he does only one great deed. The disciples heard the Lord assuring His people that those who follow Him will "have eternal life", enter the Kingdom, enter into life, etc. But having heard all that, Peter asked: "We have left all... what shall we *have*?" (Mt. 19:27). The irony of it all is tragic. They'd just been promised they would "have" eternal life. But that wasn't enough. Their focus was very much on this life; what shall we have *here and now*? They couldn't see very much beyond the present, past the curvature of their earth. Ruth's unnamed relative could have been her redeemer; but

when he realized he would have to marry her and have children, and split up his fields into more strips so as to give those children an inheritance along with that of his existing children- he pulled out. He wouldn't 'mar his inheritance'. He saw ahead to his death, to the next generation. His horizon was 20 years at most. But Boaz who didn't think like this established his spiritual inheritance eternally, and is therefore mentioned in the Lord's genealogy. Whilst the short sighted man passed off the page of history anonymously; his name wasn't preserved.

18:19 *And Jesus said to him: Why do you call me good? None is good, save one- God!*- The Greek may not mean that the Lord was implying 'Only God is good- I am not good'. Translators have added a number of words to try to flesh out the meaning of the words. The sense could just as well be 'None is as good as the one God'- and therefore, we should keep *His* commandments. In other words, the Lord is not so much saying that He Himself is not 'good' but rather refocusing the man's direction away from Himself towards the Father. For the man had come running to Him asking what he should do in order to inherit or rightfully have eternal life. And the Lord is refocusing the man upon the Father and the Father's commandments. The Lord may therefore have a rhetorical sense in His question 'why do you call Me good?'. His sense would have been: 'Why are you so keen to call me "good", setting me on a level with God? Instead, focus on obeying God's commandments and tackle your hardest challenge- to give away your wealth, and then follow Me in the itinerant life towards the cross'. The man's overly high and unrealistic view of Jesus, as if He were God Himself, was really an excuse for his own refusal to face the challenge of living the Christian life. Every false doctrine has a psychological basis, and the idea that Jesus is God and the Trinity are no different. To accept Jesus as less than God, as totally human, is a far deeper challenge to our living than accepting Jesus as being God Himself. If Jesus was human, sharing our own flesh, in which there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and yet was able to be perfect- this lays down a huge challenge to each of us. It's far less challenging to accept Jesus as God and therefore good and perfect by nature. This is why I suggest the Lord is probing *why* the man called Him "good"- and redirected him towards the need for keeping the commandments and living the committed life in practice. So we have here a passage of deep significance for discussions about the Trinity. The Lord cites the unity of God as meaning that He alone is ultimately 'good', and challenges the man who wanted to treat Him as God as to whether this was not just an excuse for not doing the hard work of following Him in practice.

18:20 *You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honour your father and mother-* Harry Whittaker makes an interesting but not totally convincing case that the rich young man here was Barnabas and these commands were very relevant to him as a Levite- see *Studies in the Gospels* chapter 148. Paul's

references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. Here the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

18:21 *And he said: All these things have I observed from my youth-* The record in Mt. 19:20 stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man's self-righteousness: "The *youth* answered, all these have I kept from my *youth* up". He was young- and he says that since a young man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn't lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive- as if to say 'You are zealous for perfection? Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!'

18:22 *And when Jesus heard it, he said to him: One thing you lack yet-* Matthew records that this was in response to his question: "What do I still lack?". And Lk. 18:22 provides the Lord's answer: "One thing you *lack* [s.w.]", but the "one thing" was to distribute his wealth and to follow Christ. The two things seem therefore related; it was the wealth which was stopping the following of Christ. The man had come to the Lord asking what great deed he must do to obtain eternal life, and so he was aware of his obedience to the commandments. He obviously felt that obedience to Mosaic law was not going to be the basis of eternal life, and he sensed that there was some great deed he must yet achieve. Therefore "What do I still lack?" shouldn't be read as an arrogant statement that he lacked nothing because he had been legally obedient. Rather is it a genuine question, seeking a concrete, clear and achievable answer.

The Lord was quoting from the LXX of Ps. 23:1. Because the Lord [Jesus] is our shepherd, "not one thing is lacking to me". The selling and sharing of his wealth is paralleled by the Lord with following Him. The one thing that was lacking was to shed his wealth *and* follow Christ. To follow Christ, to have Him as our shepherd, is therefore no merely intellectual affair, nor is it a question of legalistic obedience to a set of principles we inherited from our youth. It requires the most painful sacrifices.

*Sell all you have and distribute to the poor-* Luke again uses the word in describing how the early believers did indeed sell their possessions and 'distribute' to the poor within the ecclesia (Acts 4:35).

*And you shall have treasure in heaven-* Alluded to in James 1:12. We note that the Lord treated each person differently. He approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his possessions- whilst demanding that this rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them. The same principle is seen in His preceding teaching about divorce and remarriage- His ideal standard is not 'given' to everyone, just as it is not a requirement of everyone that they sell and they have and give to the poor. The Lord taught that we receive the Lord's goods [s.w. "what you have"] on conversion to Him (Mt. 25:14). We resign all, but receive all. By giving away our earthly wealth, we directly receive wealth in Heaven. Lk. 12:15,33,44 make a sustained play on this Greek word: "A man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the *things which he possesses* [s.w.]... sell *what you have* [s.w.] and give alms... [the Lord] will make [such a man] ruler over all *that he has* [s.w.]". Whilst the specific command to the young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor was not in one sense universal, i.e. not a command to every believer, yet the spirit of it (according to Luke 12) is indeed to be followed by us all. We must at least "forsake ['to bid farewell to'] all that [we] have [s.w.]" (Lk. 14:33). The early believers did not 'say' that anything they possessed [s.w.] was their own (Acts 4:32)- Luke surely intends us to connect this with his earlier record of how the Lord had taught that our attitude, at very least, must be that we do not really 'own' those things which we apparently 'have'.

*And come follow me-* See on Mk. 10:21; Lk. 10:42. In the first century, family and the family inheritance was everything. The way the Lord asked His followers to reject family and follow Him was far more radical than many of us can ever appreciate. Likewise His command to sell everything and follow Him implied so much- for the Middle Eastern family estate was the epitome of all that a person had and stood for. And to be asked to give the proceeds of that inheritance to poor strangers... was just too much. It could seem, once one gets to know Middle Eastern values, that to abandon both family and the village home in favour of Jesus was just impossible- those things were more valuable to a Middle Eastern peasant than life itself. But still He asked- and people responded.

Consider the parallels between the Lord's demand of the young man, and Peter's comment (Lk. 18:22 cp. 28; Mk. 10:21 cp. 28):

"Sell all that you have and  
distribute to the poor

"We have left all

...and come, take up the cross

[no comment by Peter- he censored this bit out in his hearing of the Lord's words]

and follow me"

...and have followed you"

Peter seems to have subconsciously bypassed the thing about taking up the cross. But he was sure that he was really following the Lord. He blinded himself to the inevitable link between following Christ and self-crucifixion; for the path of the man Jesus lead to Golgotha. We have this same tendency, in that we can break bread week after week, read the records of the crucifixion at least eight times / year, and yet not let ourselves grasp the most basic message: that we as followers of this man must likewise follow in our self-sacrifice to that same end.

*18:23 But when he heard these things, he became exceedingly sorrowful. For he was very rich-* Again Luke's record of the early church alludes here, speaking of how possessions were sold and the money distributed to the poorer believers (Acts 2:45; 5:1 s.w.). Mk. 10:22 describes him as "sad", literally the Greek means that he became overcast, as the sky clouding over. His joy, therefore, was because he had wrongly assumed that he could do some simple dramatic act well within his comfort zone, and thus attain an assurance of salvation. But his face clouded over when he realized that he was being called outside of his comfort zone. This is an exact picture of the disillusion which clouds so many once they perceive that the call of Christ is not to a mere social club or to surface level religion.

*18:24 And Jesus looking at him, said: How hard it shall be for those that have riches to enter into the kingdom of God!-* Mk. 10:24 speaks of the man who trusts in riches; the parallel Lk. 18:24 speaks of him who *has* riches. To have riches is, almost axiomatically, to trust in them. This is the nature of wealth 'possession'. For the man who has / trusts in riches, he must bow down like the camel wriggling through the small gate on its knees, having shed *all* its mountain of goods. This parable was given in the context of the Lord's straight statement: "He that humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk. 18:14 cp. 25). As the camel rose up from its knees the other side of the gate, so within the Kingdom's gates, those who have shed their trust in possessions will likewise be exalted.

The sense is not simply that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, but that he shall enter with difficulty. The Lord goes on to say that such shall enter the Kingdom only by God's grace and possibility of saving those who do not rise up to the higher levels that He bids us to (:27). In what, then, is the hardness or difficulty- if God is willing to accept our living on lower levels? The difficulty is in not walking away from Christ as the young man did, because of our pride; what is hard is to be like a child, the model throughout this entire discourse, and simply accept God's grace in Christ.

18:25 *For it is easier for a camel to enter in through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God-* The man walked away, whereas if he had cast himself upon the Lord's grace, or better still, sold what he had and given to the poor, then he could have right then begun to enter into the Kingdom. We begin entering the Kingdom right now; we are, according to another teaching, walking on the road to the judgment, and must get right with our brother who walks on the way there with us. The parable of the camel (i.e. the rich would-be believer) being unloaded of its wealth before it enters the city (Mt. 19:23,24) represents a rich man entering the Kingdom (the city = the Kingdom, as in Rev. 22:14; 21:2; Heb. 13:14; 11:16; a city can also represent believers). If he sheds his riches now, it follows he is then able in some sense to enter the Kingdom now. In these few words is our highest challenge in this age.

In the beauty and depth of His simplicity, the Lord comprehended all this in some of the most powerful sentences of all time: *It is very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom.* He *must* shed his riches, like the camel *had* to unload to pass through the needle gate. This is such a powerful lesson. And it's so simple. It doesn't need any great expositional gymnastics to understand it. Like me, you can probably remember a few things very vividly from your very early childhood. I remember my dear dad showing me this as a very young child, with a toy camel and a gate drawn on a piece of paper. And I saw the point, at four, five, maybe six. It is *so clear*. But what of our bank balances now, now we're old and brave? It's easier for a camel, the Lord said. Why? Surely because someone else unloads the camel, he (or she) has no say in it. But in the story, surely we must be the camel who unloads himself, who shakes it all off his humps, as an act of the will. And as we've seen, the spirit of all this applies to every one of us, including those without bank accounts.

Luke's writings bear the marks of a doctor writing; he uses exact medical terms. Luke's medical language is clearly seen in how he records the Lord's words about "passing through the eye of a needle". He uses the Greek medical term *belone*- a surgeon's needle. Matthew and Mark use the more domestic word *raphis* (Mt. 19:24; Mk. 10:25).

18:26 *And they that heard it said: Then who can be saved?-* They were really so shocked (Mt.) that wealth made it hard to enter the Kingdom, implying they were strongly persuaded that wealth was a gift from God and a sign of His approval of a man. This of course was quite foreign to the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and other teaching of the Lord, and so we see how far they had been from understanding His most basic teachings.

"Can be..." translates the same word the Lord uses in the next verse to say that with God, even the saving of the wealthy who don't quit their

wealth is "possible"- on the basis, therefore, of His willingness to accept a lower standard of achievement to that He ideally requires.

*18:27 But he said: The things which are impossible with men are possible with God-* The status of *para* God is often applied to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:52; Jn. 6:46; 8:40; 16:27; Acts 2:33). The suggestion could be that because of the status of the Lord Jesus with the Father, such gracious salvation is possible which would be impossible if men simply had to have the steel will to obey the Father's ideal principles.

The idea of possibility with God is lifted from the Septuagint of the word to Sarah about the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). Those Old Testament heroes were not merely stained glass figures- our own belief in salvation regardless of wealth is as dramatic as the belief of an old woman that she could have a child. The context here, however, is talking of how those who choose a lower level- in this case, *not* selling their wealth and giving to the poor- can still be saved by God's gracious possibility.

There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. Here the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that "with God all things are possible"- without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human strength is meaningless: "I know that You can do everything". It may be that Jesus is even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job. See too Mt. 5:27-30.

*18:28 And Peter said: We have left our own-* See on Lk. 14:27. The family based structure of the first century is hard to fully empathize with from our distance. Family was all. Peter comments that the disciples had "left our own homes" (Lk. 18:28 RVmg.), and the parallel Mt. 19:27 says "left *all*". Your home was your all. To have to leave it for the sake of Christ was the most fundamental thing you could do. Hence the real meaning in the first century of the Lord's response that such converts would receive families in this life, i.e. in their relationships in the ecclesia. And yet the radical call of Christ is no less demanding and intrusive as men and women meet it today, the only difference being that the starkness of the choices is less pronounced today- but just as essentially real.

*And followed you-* Just as Peter's claim to have "left all" was perhaps questionable, likewise Peter seems to have under-estimated what 'following Christ' really meant- for the idea of carrying the cross is strongly connected with following Christ (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). And Peter failed to carry that cross to the end, for he denied the Lord when the going got tough.

18:29 *And he said to them: Truly I say to you-* This is in response to Peter's claim that they had "left all and followed You" (Mt. 19:27). The Lord doesn't comment upon Peter's claim. This may well have been because He knew that Peter had not in fact "left all" to the degree that Peter thought he had. They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. The Lord was so generous spirited towards His disciples. He knew that Peter would not follow Him as planned, to the cross- indeed, none of them would (Jn. 13:36,37), but He speaks to them as if they would be successful ultimately in following Him.

*There is no one that has left house, or wife, or brothers, or parents, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake-* See on Acts 8:12. This list of things to be forsaken, with Matthew adding houses and lands, recalls the language of the Levites forsaking these things in order to serve God (Ex. 32:26-29; Dt. 33:8-10). The secular disciples again are encouraged to see themselves as the Levites of the new Israel the Lord was creating. And note that the Lord speaks of how His followers will each have left mother, brother etc. to serve Him, referring to how Moses blessed Levi for forsaking these very things so as to God's service (Dt. 33:9). And there is no Christian who has heart and soul committed themselves to the Gospel's work, either in the world or amongst their brethren, who has not lived to see the truth of this definition of priesthood.

"For My Name's sake" is parallel with "The kingdom of God's sake" (Mt. 19:29). The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

18:30 *Who shall not receive many times more in this time-* See on Mt. 10:27 for the allusion to Job. The Lord's prophecy that the believer receives fathers, mothers, houses, lands etc. only has its fulfilment insofar as the ecclesia is willing to share these things and relationships with its members. But the condition of the fulfilment was not explicitly stated. We forsake all human relationships to follow the Lord Jesus (Mt. 19:27-29). And He promises to compensate for this even in this life. But it depends to what extent we are willing to accept and perceive it. Through meaningful fellowship with our brethren we will find those relationships which we have given up compensated for, even if we aren't physically close to our brethren. In reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt we read: "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (Ps. 68:6). To be set in a new family is paralleled with being brought out from slavery. Part of the process of our redemption is that we are set in a new ecclesial family. This must be a reference to how Israel were brought out on Passover night, where the

families and lonely ones had to join together into households big enough to kill a lamb for. The implication of Ps. 68 could be that it was in these family groups that they travelled through the wilderness. The N.C.V. reads: "God is in his holy Temple. He is a father to orphans, and he defends the widows. God gives the lonely a home. He leads prisoners out with joy...". The very house / family of God becomes the house / family of the lonely. Hence the ecclesia *is* the house of God (1 Cor. 3:16). We find true family in the new family of God. By baptism we are "added together" with those others who are likewise saved in Christ (Acts 2:47 RVmg.). We will live together eternally with the other members of this new body and community which we enter. The links between us within that new family are even stronger than those with our natural family; and hence any division amongst the family of God is the greatest tragedy. What this means in practice is that we must fellowship each other. Even if we are isolated from other believers, one can always write letters, make phone calls, invite others to visit them, attempt to meet others...

*And in the age to come, eternal life-* These are the very words of the rich young man earlier in the chapter. The answer to that man's question was that we have to lose now, if we are to win eternally; we must forsake material things if we are to inherit the life eternal. As he was only a young man, it's likely that his wealth had been inherited. He was being told that the greatest inheritance was of life eternal, but this didn't come easily nor by good luck or circumstance, but in response to a lifetime of following Jesus. The things which were to be forsaken include [putting the records in Mark and Luke together with Matthew]: family, brothers, sisters, father, mother, lands, houses etc. These were all the things which the young man had received by inheritance, and to forsake association with his family, on behalf of whom he had received his wealth, would've been crazy and social suicide. It was as crazy as trashing a winning lottery ticket and walking away the same you were before you bought it. But this is the radical calling of those who must forsake materialism in order to inherit eternity. Therefore all seeking for material advantage in this life is surely inappropriate if in fact we are to forsake it even if it comes to us without our seeking it.

18:31 *And he took aside the twelve-* The implication is that there were others travelling with them, and the Lord wished to explain the reality of the cross to the disciples alone.

*And said to them: We will go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets about the Son of Man shall be accomplished-* Mark adds: "And Jesus went before them, and they were amazed; and as they followed they were sore afraid". They went "up", uphill to Jerusalem. These small details all support the position that the Gospels were written by eye witnesses and were not created many years later by people who were not present. They were going the opposite direction of man in the

parable of the Good Samaritan, who went *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho. We may be able to infer that the Lord intended us to read that man as one who was not going in the way of the cross, who was going away from Jerusalem rather than towards it- and who was still saved by the grace of the Samaritan / Jesus.

18:32 *For he shall be delivered up to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked and shamefully treated, and spat upon-* See on 1 Thess. 2:2. As noted on :15, this refers to the judgments upon Israel in Is. 50:2,6. The Greek for "delivered up" means literally 'to hand over'; the idea of betrayal was maybe implicit, but not as explicit as in the English word 'betrayed'. The word is very common on the lips of the Lord, as if He saw the moment of 'handing over' as the quintessence of all His sufferings- the hand over from God's providential protection to the powers of darkness. He has just spoken of how the Pharisee treated the tax collector shamefully, and the unjust judge had no shame in shaming those who needed justice. The Lord is asking them to see that He is the one identified with those weak, marginalized, sinful people; and will suffer at the hands of those in secular power just as they had done.

18:33 *And they shall scourge and kill him, and on the third day he shall rise again-* The scourging alludes to the punishments upon Israel in Josh. 22:13. Indeed so many of the judgments on Israel were experienced by Jesus on the Cross:

Hos. 2:3,6 = Mt. 27:27-29; Jn. 19:28

Josh. 22:13 = Lk. 18:33

Ps. 89:30-32; Is. 28:18 = Mt. 27:30

Ez. 22:1-5 = Jesus mocked by Gentile Roman soldiers, Mt. 27:27-31

Is. 50:2,6 = Mt. 26:67; 27:30; Lk. 18:32

Jer. 18:16 = Mt. 27:39

These similarities are too close to have been engineered humanly; if it is accepted that Jesus was crucified, it does not seem unreasonable to accept that the sufferings of Jesus described in the New Testament really did happen. It therefore follows that Jesus of Nazareth did bear the sin and judgments of Israel, and therefore He is their saviour-Messiah. Judaism struggles with this observation.

The Lord's detailed knowledge of His sufferings could have been beamed into Him, or He could have worked some of it out from Old Testament types and prophecies. But it seems to me that because He gave His life of Himself, it was not taken from Him by the machinations of others, He therefore arranged the entire scenario so that these things would happen.

18:34 *And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, and they did not understand the things that were said-* See on Lk. 9:45. Luke earlier notes that the saying about the cross was "hidden"

from them (Lk. 9:45), in confirmation of their own refusal to understand it because it demanded that they too suffer with their Lord. And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hidden from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This gives insight into the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3). Matthew adds that there arose a controversy as to who should be the leaders in the new community; and when the Lord earlier explained His passion, Luke also adds that straight afterwards, "there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest" (Lk. 9:46). Time and again we see this in the Gospels- when the Lord speaks of His upcoming death, the disciples change the subject. This explains our own problem with mind wandering at the breaking of bread or in the study or even reading of the crucifixion accounts. This difficulty on focusing upon Him there is likely because His death requires our death and suffering, and subconsciously we realize that- and would rather not.

*18:35 And it came to pass, as he drew near to Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging-* Matthew's account of the healing of the two blind men as they *left* Jericho must be compared with the healing of Bartimaeus as He *left* Jericho (Mk. 10:46), and now the healing of a blind man as He *approached* Jericho (Lk. 18:35). These accounts are not in contradiction. One of the two blind men was Bartimaeus, and he is the one Mark focuses on. The healing of the first blind man is indeed described in the same terms as the healing of the other blind men, but the similarity of the language is in order to demonstrate how the Lord worked in the same way in different lives at slightly different times. And there are other examples of incidents repeating in Biblical history but being described in similar language. We are left with an abiding impression that what happens in our lives has been in essence repeated in other lives. And surely the healing of the first blind man inspired the others to take the same leap of faith, just as we are to be inspired by the way others have responded to the Lord's hand in their lives.

If indeed there are major bloomers in the Gospels and in the Bible generally [as the critics suggest regarding these incidents of healing the blind men], then naturally the question arises as to how reliable the Biblical text really is. Liberal Christians tend to argue that some is, other parts aren't. But no basis is given for deciding which parts are reliable and which are not. Nor does there seem any reason why God would inspire some parts of the Bible but not others. But the wonder is that the Bible, and the Gospels particularly, can be analysed at depth and found not to contradict but rather to dovetail seamlessly in a way in which no human piece of writing ever could. This is particularly seen in the four Gospels, and it is this seamlessness and lack of contradiction which led sceptics

like Frank Morrison in *Who Moved the Stone?* to become committed believers in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In musical terms, the whole united record reads as a symphony. There is no need to remove one note from it, or a few notes here and there. The overall wonder is lost by doing so, to the point that it is a desecration of the Divine product. If there are passages which we cannot reconcile, the way of humility is surely to accept that we are still waiting for more insight and understanding- rather than arrogantly insisting that Divine inspiration somehow faltered at that point.

18:36 *And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant-* The idea is not 'Whatever is going on?' but rather is he enquiring of the significance of all this. There is a similar incident in Mt. 21:10,11, where part of the crowd ask: "Who is this?", and the other part answer back: "This is Jesus the prophet". They were trying to echo Ps. 24:8,10: "Who is this king of glory?" is answered by "The Lord strong and mighty". This was understood as how the crowds were to call to each other in the Messianic procession. Perhaps this man was attempting to have a part in what he believed to be a Messianic event; in this case, he would have accepted that the Lord was Messiah. He was inspired by previous healings of blind men in Mt. 9:27, who would have surely spread the message that they considered their healer to be Jesus the Messiah.

18:37 *And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passes by-* As noted on :36, this could be understood as their participation in some Messianic procession, whereby one shouted "Who is this?" and the answer was then given. This would explain why the man addresses Him as "Son of David", a title associated with Messiah's enthronement.

18:38 *And he cried, saying: Jesus, you son of David, have mercy on me!*- These were exactly the words of the two blind men of Mt. 9:27, who were likewise cured by the Lord on the outskirts a town, just as here the cure happened as He approached Jericho. They are also similar words to the healing of the blind men recorded after the Lord leaves Jericho. The similarity and connection is obvious. From God's side, we see how He works according to pattern in the lives of people. And humanly, the blind man had somehow passed on to other blind men the truth that there was mercy / grace in the Son of David, which could be manifested in the restoration of sight. In this lies the significance of the fact that according to Matthew and Mark, other blind men said exactly these words and made exactly this request as the Lord *departed* from Jericho. Far from being [as supposed by the critics] a jumbling up of material by uninspired writers, we see rather the development of a theme- that blind men at various places and times approached the Lord with the same words, and made the same connection between His mercy and Him being the Son of David. They may simply have thought that as the Son of David, He had the characteristics of David- which included remarkable mercy and grace to

his enemies. We also see how once a community is broken into with the Gospel, it spreads within that community, expressed in the words and concepts which that community understands, and in the style which originated with the first ones in the community who accepted the Gospel. I have seen this happen in communities of the deaf, Gypsies, HIV patients, ethnic minorities under persecution, language groups etc. And so it happened amongst the blind beggar community in Palestine. Such communities have amazing links to each other and paths of communication.

The connection between "the son of David" and "mercy" is surely rooted in the description of the promises to David as "the mercies [*chesed*] of David" (Is. 55:3; Acts 13:34; 1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chron. 1:8; Ps. 89:49 "The mercies which You promised unto David"; Is. 16:5 "In mercy shall the throne be established... in the tent of David"). These promises were utter grace; "mercy" translates *chesed*, which is about the closest the OT comes to the NT concept of grace. David rejoiced in this *chesed* / mercy shown to him (2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ps. 101:1). Solomon pleaded for grace on the basis of the fact that God had shown such covenant mercies to David (2 Chron. 6:42 "Remember the mercies of David"). The mercies of David surely also refer to God's mercy, the mercy of grace, shown to David in forgiving him the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah- he begged for forgiveness on the basis of God's "tender mercies" (Ps. 51:1). It could be argued that David's forgiveness was on account of his pleading for the mercies shown to him in the Davidic covenant to be continued to him. For in that covenant God had promised that *chesed* would not depart from David (2 Sam. 7:15), and David therefore begs for forgiveness on the basis that grace / *chesed* would indeed not be withdrawn from him (Ps. 51:1). From all this, David pleaded in crisis towards the end of his life to fall into God's hands because "His mercies are great" (2 Sam. 24:14). In response to the *chesed* ["mercy", or grace] shown David, he too was characterized by humanly senseless *chesed* to his enemies in the family of Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 2:5 "you have shewed this kindness / *chesed* unto Saul"; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:1,7) and to Hanun his Ammonite enemy (2 Sam. 10:2 "I will shew kindness / *chesed* unto the Hanun"). What is so impressive is that the network of blind men, from Galilee to Jericho, had figured this out, or at least part of it. They saw the connection between grace and David, and were inspired to throw themselves upon the grace of David's Messianic Son. There was in those times [as there is in much of the world today] a deep belief that blindness was the direct result of sin (Jn. 9:2). These blind men almost certainly felt that their blindness was a result of their sin, and so they felt a moral need for forgiveness, so that the blindness would be lifted. According to Mk. 10:46, one of the blind men was called Bartimaeus, literally 'Son of the unclean'- doubtless this was what he had been dubbed by others, for no Hebrew mother would have named her son that. And they believed that Jesus could indeed cleanse them, morally forgive them, and thereby

restore their sight. This would explain why they screamed [Gk.] "Have mercy on us!". This was a moral request; they didn't simply call out for healing.

18:39 *And those who led the way rebuked him-* This is yet another example of where the Lord is presented as eager to accept, when men [including disciples] are more eager to reject. The same word has just been used for how the disciples rebuked the little ones from coming to the Lord- and were in turn rebuked. The impression is that in the disciples' exclusivity, they weren't being [as they supposed] more spiritual than the world around them, but rather were they being simply as that world. Soon afterwards, the Pharisees told the Lord to "rebuke" His disciples, and He replied that it was impossible for them to "hold their peace" (Lk. 19:39,40). These are all words and phrases taken from this incident. Now it is the disciples who refuse to be quiet, and it is the Pharisees who want them to be quiet. Again the point is made that the desire to silence and exclude others is from the world, and not of Christ. The Lord's acceptance of people is consistently painted by the Gospels as being far more inclusive and extensive than that of men. The human tendency to reject and erect barriers is simply not there in Christ.

*Saying that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more: You son of David, have mercy on me!-* This could be seen as the result of the Lord's piquing their sense of urgency for Christ by not responding immediately. This is also a factor in some of His delayed responses to our own needs.

18:40 *And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him-* The Lord could have walked up to the man as He did to others when curing them. But on this occasion He wished to teach that His calling of men to Him for healing often uses a human mechanism. The "call" comes through people bringing others to the Lord. The Lord "calls" just as the people "called" the man. The Lord's calling and our calling of men are thereby paralleled. The experience of being called by the Lord is not to be seen as an onerous call to responsibility before Him; rather is it the source of "courage". His calling is because He wants to do something good for us, rather than saddle us with the weight of responsibility to judgment.

18:41 *What do you want me to do for you? And he said: Lord, that I may receive my sight-* The Lord had a way of focusing men upon their need. Thus He would have passed by the desperate disciples as they struggled in the storm, He would have gone further on the road to Emmaus, and He later asked the blind men the obvious question: "What will you that I shall do unto you?" (Mt. 20:32). He only partially cured another blind man, to focus that man's mind on the faith that was needed for the second and final stage of the cure (Mk. 8:23-25). He elicited from the father of the

epileptic child the miserable childhood story of the boy- not that the Lord needed to know it, but to concentrate the man on his need for the Lord's intervention (Mk. 9:21). He wanted them to focus on their need: in this case, for sight. He let Peter start to sink, and only then, when Peter's whole heart and soul were focused on the Lord, did He stretch forth His hand. The Lord deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus until he was dead and buried; to elicit within His followers the acuteness of their need. And was He *really* sleeping in the boat with the storm all around Him? Was He not waiting there for them to finally quit their human efforts and come running to Him with faith in no other (Mk. 4:38,39)? Only when men were thus focused on their desperate need for the Lord would He answer them. The Lord further focused men's need when he asked the lame man: "Do you want to be made whole?" (Jn. 5:6). Of course the man wanted healing. But the Lord first of all focused his desire for it.

The one thing he wanted was to see. The healed blind man is a type of us. True understanding (seeing) should be the one thing we want. "Wisdom is the *principal* thing; therefore get wisdom" Prov. 4:7). This was obviously a rhetorical question, and it succeeded in the intention of making the men verbalize their dominant desire. Likewise the Lord works with us to make us focus and understand what is our dominant desire- and then seeks to reposition that focus. In this section He has done that by placing all human desires and requests in the shadow of His death for us. For how could we want anything 'extra' after He has done that for us, with all it enabled.

18:42 *And Jesus said to him: Receive your sight; your faith has made you whole-* The Greek term for "receive your sight" is literally 'look up', and is the word used for how the Lord had a habit of praying to God with open, uplifted eyes. There is surely the hint that the gift of sight was to encourage the man in his relationship with God, and likewise "whole" suggests that the man as a person was now "whole". The miracle was a gift of spiritual things as well as literal sight; which is why the man now follows the Lord (:43). The 'gift of heavenly health' is by grace; the Lord is eager to act directly upon willing hearts to give us the spiritual energy to follow Him.

18:43 *And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God-* As the Lord left Jericho, two other blind men were healed and they too followed the Lord in the way (Mk. 10:52). So surely they had heard of His healing power from the testimony of this blind man who followed Him throughout Jericho and then out the other side. We notice that he witnessed to blind men; we most powerfully take the gospel to those in our situation, and not to those in far off lands of other cultures. This is to be done; but witness is essentially personal and is to those of our own background and

experience. And even before meeting those blind men, this man's praise of God influenced "all the people" to do likewise.

## CHAPTER 19

19:1 *And he entered Jericho and was passing through-* As noted at the end of chapter 18, the blind man healed on the Lord's approach to Jericho followed Him through Jericho, and led to the conversion of two other blind men as the Lord left Jericho. So we can imagine this healed blind man following the Lord as He passed through Jericho.

19:2 *And a man named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector, and rich-* Meyer suggests there was a profitable balsam trade in Jericho, which would have enriched the tax collectors. Lightfoot quotes evidence that such people were not allowed to be legal witnesses: "These are persons not capable of giving any public testimony, shepherds, exactors, and publicans". The same was true for women. And yet it was exactly these kinds of people and categories whom the Lord chose to be His witnesses. To this day, He delights in using those who have little human credibility nor ability as witnesses. In this sense our sense of inadequacy to witness is our adequacy; it is in fact the prime qualification. This incident is a natural follow on from the Lord's parable about the repentant tax collector and the Pharisee. Only Luke records that, and this historical account is also unique to Luke, so he appears under inspiration to be exemplifying how the parable worked out in practice. 'Zacchaeus' in Hebrew means 'pure'; he who was far from pure was justified by faith and grace, as was the tax collector of the parable.

"And rich" connects with the recently recorded teaching of the Lord that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom; but with God it is possible, and the conversion of Zacchaeus is again a worked example of this. It is only by deep conviction of sin and fellowship with the Lord personally that the rich can be led to part with their wealth.

19:3 *Was seeking to see who Jesus was; but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature-* The fact nobody made way for him is a tacit reflection of how his wealth had not bought him respect. As he was seeking Jesus, so the Lord was seeking him (:10). We see here the mutuality which there is between us and the Lord.

19:4 *And he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way-* The Lord likewise foreknew Nathanael when he was far off under a tree (Jn. 1:48). The similarity simply shows that the Lord works in similar ways in parallel lives. And this is the basis of our fellowship in Him- shared experience of the same style of the Lord's operation with us. Running ahead of a person and association with tree leaves can be seen as heralding the triumphant entry of Messiah. This will be recorded later in this chapter, but perhaps the idea is that the Lord saw His triumphal entries at this stage as being into the homes of sinners rather than into the Jerusalem temple.

19:5 *And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him: Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house-* The Lord had taught His preachers to enquire who in a town was "worthy" and stay at their home (Mt. 10:11). He is forcing the conclusion that He can declare the unworthy to be worthy, just as the unjust tax collector of the earlier parable was declared just. This is all Luke's way of paving the way for his friend Paul's later expression of all this in terms of justification by grace and faith.

By calling Zacchaeus by name, when apparently they had never before met, the Lord was showing that He knew His sheep and was calling him by name (Jn. 10:3). He urges him to respond quickly, and this fits in with a major theme in Luke of quick response to the Lord, culminating in the apparently 'quick' baptisms recorded in Acts. Speed of response is not only appropriate to any call from the Lord, but unless we respond quickly, the flesh tends to kick in and reason us out of the response we need to make.

19:6 *And he made haste and came down-* The speed of his response is significant. Subconsciously, the message of Jesus which he had heard must have been working within him. When he then encountered the Lord, it all came together. The word was made flesh. There was something in Him which was and is incredibly compelling.

*And received him joyfully-* Luke is presenting Zacchaeus as the parade example of how whoever receives the Son receives the Father, and Luke in 9:48 recorded Him saying that and immediately commenting that "the least", the littlest, is the greatest. The "little" height of Zacchaeus may also allude to the Lord's recent ultimatum that the Kingdom must be "received" (s.w.) as a little one (18:17). The joy of Zacchaeus is that joy which is so often mentioned in Luke-Acts as accompanying true conversion. We note that the Lord alludes to His parable of seeking and finding the lost sheep in the context of what His 'finding' Zacchaeus (:10). When the sheep was found, the shepherd rejoices (15:5). This is the same word translated "joyfully". There is a mutuality between the Lord and His people; His joy is their joy.

19:7 *And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying: He is gone in to lodge with a man that is a sinner-* Presumably Zacchaeus had been disobedient to the teaching of John the Baptist to "Exact no more than is appointed". Here was a totally secular person, uninfluenced by John's preparatory work, simply coming to the Lord because he sensed the truth in Him. "Lodge" suggests He spent the night there (s.w. LXX Gen. 24:23). Again we notice the guilt by association mentality of the people. Who you stayed with and ate with was seen as a religious act; and the Lord was doing this without any statement of repentance from Zacchaeus. It was by offering this kind of open, outgoing fellowship that the Lord sought and found Zacchaeus; and the repentance was elicited from that radical

acceptance. This was in marked contrast to the attitude that such signs of fellowship should only be granted once a person had cleared certain bars and demonstrated their spiritual level.

*19:8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord: Behold Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wrongfully exacted something from anyone, I restore fourfold-* The rich young ruler has recently been told, recorded by Luke, to sell *all* he had and give to the poor. Zacchaeus offered half of his wealth to the poor. And this was acceptable. Or it could be that he means that half of his goods would be spent restoring what he had stolen, and the other half would go to the poor. The fourfold restitution seems far above that of the Jewish law (Num. 5:7), but apparently Roman law required fourfold restitution of stolen goods.

The way he stands and addresses the Lord could perhaps be Luke framing this as a public confession of faith and repentance, of the kind seen before baptism in the early church. Zacchaeus is being set up as a role model.

*19:9 And Jesus said to him: Today salvation has come to this house, as he also is a son of Abraham-* See on Acts 16:34. The stress on "house" was presumably to meet the criticism that He had entered the house (:7). But the "house" probably refers to the household. The family would see a huge drop in their wealth- and it was that which converted them to salvation. It was the very inverse of the claims of the prosperity gospel. It is as if Zacchaeus is being set up as the opposite of the rich young man of 18:23. When the synagogue excommunicated a man, he was stated to no longer be a "son of Abraham". The Lord is demonstrating His authority to utterly override all such statements that excommunication from a religious group means that a person is not in the wider community of God's true people. He sets Himself up as the ultimate deciding authority in a new Israel comprised of serious sinners and secular, non-religious types. Zacchaeus presumably continued in his daily work and therefore remained outside the synagogue system- but a "son of Abraham".

The Lord predicates salvation upon being a son of Abraham. But this man was Jewish already; the conclusion is that natural descent would not bring salvation, but rather a faith in Messiah as Abraham had, continuing the family characteristic. Perhaps Zacchaeus is called a son of Abraham in that he too repented of his self-centred materialism, walking away from much wealth to become a nomad.

*19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost-* See on Mt. 13:46; Lk. 9:54,55; 15:2; 1 Cor. 10:33. As noted on :7, the Lord extended fellowship to sinners in order to bring them to repentance; rather than giving it to them as a reward for attaining some level of understanding or spirituality. And this should be reflected in our open

approach to people. The allusion is clearly to the parable of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep; the joy of the shepherd in that parable is described with the same word as the joy of Zacchaeus (:6; 15:5).

19:11 *And as they heard these things, he added and spoke a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear-* The question was: 'Will the Kingdom come really soon, like, in our lifetimes?'. Answer: the parable of the minas. Trade *your* personal talent- because there is such a thing as people being rejected at the last day because they didn't do this. See on Lk. 21:7. The disciples clearly thought that arrival at Jerusalem meant the appearing of the Kingdom of God in its political form. They had totally missed His teaching that Jerusalem meant death on a cross for Him; and that the gospel of the Kingdom is now about life lived under God's Kingship and dominion, rather than political freedom from the Romans. They had missed the obvious and basic point of His teachings because they would not budge from their preconceived theological and natural convictions. And this happens with so many today, and in some ways with us all.

19:12 *He therefore said: A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom and then return-* The Lord has recently spoken of how *we* are to 'receive the kingdom' as a child if we are to enter it (18:17). The nobleman here refers to the Lord Jesus. He doesn't ask us to do anything which in essence He has not done. He received the Kingdom as God's "holy child" (Acts 4:27,30), and He asks us to do likewise. This makes 'receiving the Kingdom' mean accepting that really, we shall be there. It is ours, even now. "Yours [God's] is the Kingdom", but it is given to the Lord Jesus "for himself", just as it is to us too. For us it is an ongoing experience- "we receiving a Kingdom... let us have grace" (Heb. 12:28).

The parable has some similarities with events recorded by Josephus. Herod Archelaus travelled to Rome in order to be given his kingdom; the Jews sent an embassy to Augustus, the Caesar, while Archelaus was travelling to Rome, to complain that they did not want Archelaus as their ruler; when Archelaus returned, he arranged for 3000 of his enemies to be brought to him at the temple, where he had them slaughtered. The palace of Archelaus was near Jericho, and as the Lord has just left Jericho, this would explain the allusion to him in this parable- perhaps the Lord was building on a passing discussion about Archelaus, ever eager to turn secular chit chat into spiritual teaching- just as we should be.

Absentee landlords were unpopular; and the accusation was that they reaped what they had not sown, demanding harvest which they had not laboured for. And the one mina man makes just this complaint. The Lord

presents Himself in this parable as a man deemed to be unreasonable and unpopular- when in fact this was not the case.

19:13 *And he called ten servants of his-* A picture of how the Lord considers us to be His very own.

*Gave them ten minas and said to them-* A mina or "talent" was worth 6000 denarii, or pennies. And a penny a day was the going wage for a worker in time of harvest, according to another parable. This is therefore in total about 20 years' salary. The element of unreality in this parable is that this was a huge amount of money to entrust in cash to only ten servants. And they are asked to "trade with this", to take the initiative, apparently without much prior instruction by their master. All is in their court. He has no mechanism in place to check up on them nor practically advise them on a day to day basis. They as slaves would not have been accustomed to taking much initiative. The only pattern they had was the example set by their master in *his* trading whilst he was with them. All this speaks of the huge and risky delegation that was and is made to God's people. In a personal sense, according to the promise of the Comforter in Jn. 14-16, the Lord is not absent from us. He is not distant, He is with us by His Spirit, so that He is just as really present with us as He was during His ministry on earth. But for the purposes of the parable, emphasizing the huge extent of freewill and initiative required from us, He is 'absent'. He doesn't tell them to simply keep his property intact and maintained. He asks them to proactively trade and increase His wealth. This idea vastly broadens our horizons. Such work is to be our career, the ideal, Divinely intended outlet for all our creativity, resources and abilities.

*Trade with this until I return-* How far His affairs prosper is dependent upon the zeal and initiative of us His stewards (Lk. 19:12,13; 1 Cor. 4:1,2). In this parable, the servants as a group are given the wealth, but they trade with it as individuals. This is a helpful way to view all that has been given to the community of believers. Division and argument between them, arguing over who has what, is a sure way to impede the overall intention of the nobleman who has so trusted us on both a collective and individual level. All the riches are hidden "in Christ" and are displayed in the entire unity of the body of Christ across both Jew and Gentile (Col. 1:27; 2:2). What has been given to the church collectively is the Holy Spirit, in order to build up the church and powerfully witness in the world. The one talent man is in denial of this, without the Spirit, and simply holding onto the mina without using it.

As a whole, the church of all ages will fully have manifested His character, His total riches. This is why it may be that the true church has been concentrated on different aspects of spirituality at different times. It also explains why the final date of the coming of Christ is in some way

dependent upon our spiritual development. And it also explains why the whole body of Christ is told collectively "trade until I return", using the Greek *pragmateuomai*, i.e. be pragmatic, be realistic, and develop these characteristics, so you may as a body reach the full reflection of Christ. See on Eph. 4:15.

The believer is called to his Lord to receive his minas, and yet is also again called to Him in judgment at His return (Lk. 19:13,15). The repetition of the idea of being called to our Lord surely suggests that our calling to Him in the first place is in fact a calling to judgment. We are being gathered to judgment *now* (Mt. 13:47; 22:10; Jn. 11:52) although we will be gathered then to meet the Lord (s.w. Mt. 3:12; 13:30). The point is, we must act now as men and women will do when they are on their way to judgment, and the meeting with their ultimate destiny. Then we will not be bickering amongst ourselves or worrying about our worldly advantage; then, only one thing will matter. And so now, only one thing matters. The Christian life is likened to a man on his way to his judge along with his adversary (Lk. 12:58); and evidently, he ought to settle his differences with his brother before he arrives, for this judge will be extremely hard upon those who cannot be reconciled to their brethren.

We notice that in this parable, the Lord hints nothing about His death. He simply says He is going away and shall return. This was a concession to their weakness; He had explained His upcoming death many times, and they had ignored it. He accepted their blindness to His death, and worked with it by not featuring His death as part of the parable. We too need to work with an acceptance of others' blindness on some points.

The same word for "trade" is translated "work" in the parable of the sons working in the vineyard (Mt. 21:28). Whilst salvation is on the basis of grace and not works (Rom. 4:4,5), there is all the same a fundamental call to "work" in response to that grace. If we do not, then we have to remember that "faith without works is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). And this is a severe temptation. To believe, to assent to Christian and Biblical ideas, but not to respond further, thinking that the mere possession of the ideas is enough. This was the one talent man; his faith remained "alone". The "work" was to be done within the vineyard. The ecclesia of Christ, the body of Christ, is merely a structure enabling our response in practice. The "work" was to harvest the fruit of the vine- to work with others bringing them in to the final harvest of salvation. In another metaphor, we ourselves are to bring forth fruit on the vine; but the metaphor of harvesting used in 21:28 and in other parables of the vineyard surely speaks of harvesting others for the Kingdom. The same word will be used by the Lord in saying that the Son of Man has left his house and given to each man in the household his "work" (Mk. 13:34). We each have a specific work or trading to do, tailored personally to what

the Lord has given us. Sadly, the structure of church life has often become so developed and defined that the average church member assumes that the work is being done by the specialists. "Get professional help" is the comment made on so many cases of personal need encountered; "Read the book... come to the seminars... to the meetings" can all be a passing up of our personal responsibility to work. The judgment seat is largely about presenting to the Lord our work in this life. And yet John uses the same word in recording the Lord's comment that the deeds ['trading', s.w.] of the faithful are even now "made manifest that they are wrought in God" if we come to the light of the cross which is the basis of all self-examination and self-understanding (Jn 3:21).

We can indeed prove / examine our own work [s.w.] even in this life (Gal. 6:4). People are never better than when they perceive clearly their calling and the work they are intended to do- and give their lives to doing it. Barnabas and Saul were 'called' just as the servants here were 'called' (:13) to do the 'work' [s.w. 'trading'] of spreading the Gospel (Acts 13:2), and experienced the Spirit confirming them in the "work" [s.w.] they were 'fulfilling' (Acts 14:26). The idea of 'fulfilling' a work given suggests that they were fulfilling God's intention for them. And again we note that the work was related to bringing others to Christ. Just as the servants 'went' to 'trade', so Paul talks of 'going' to "the work" [s.w. 'trade'], again in the context of missionary work (Acts 15:38). God will render to every man according to his "works" (s.w. Rom. 2:6). Our trading is the basis upon which we will be judged. The gift has been given by pure grace, as it was to the servants; but we have to respond to that grace, lest we have believed and accepted in vain. It is the works *of the law* [of Moses] which will not justify (Rom. 3:20); rather our works are to be those in response to the Lord's great gifts to us. 1 Cor. 3:13-15 uses this same word for 'working / trading' and again applies it to our work in building others up- and the day of judgment will declare the quality of that work. The Corinthians were therefore Paul's "work in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1), even though he baptized virtually none of them, his efforts for them were his attempt to trade / work with the talents given him. God clearly has intended works / trading for each of us, "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And the NT usage of the idea of works / trading is nearly always in the context of preaching or caring for others. Paul may well have himself in mind when he promises the Philippians that "He who began a good work in you [Paul's initial preaching at Philippi] will work at finishing it right up to the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6 cp. 22). The key is to be open to God's leading. Thus Paul urged Timothy to purge himself from bad company so that he might be prepared or ready "unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21), and to devote himself to the Scriptures that he might be "equipped unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). These works are surely those "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And we should be "ready to every good work... thoughtful to

be ready for good works" (Tit. 3:1,8), thoughtfully open to God's leading in response to our prayer to be shown what exactly is the work / trading intended for us. A functional church will be a place where the members are all devoted to this principle personally, and thus will "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). And God will confirm our openness and willingness; He will "frame you in every good work to do His will" (Heb. 13:21 Gk.).

19:14 *But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying: We do not want this man to reign over us-* "They hated Joseph" because of his dream that one day he would reign over them (Gen. 37:4,8). The Lord Jesus likewise had problems with His brothers (Jn. 7:3); the Jews hated Him and would not have him reign over them even though they were potentially the citizens of His Kingdom. His Kingdom is that of the Father, and Israel at that time were His Kingdom. But because they refused His Son as King, they ceased to be the Kingdom of God (Ez. 21:25-27). The delegation gives no reason for their refusal; for there was and is no credible reason to refuse the Lord's kingship over men.

19:15 *And it came to pass, when he had returned, having received the kingdom, that he commanded these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading-* If we are to take the judgment figures literally, the question arises: Does the Lord know beforehand who will be accepted, and the degree of their reward? If we take the judgment figures to have a literal meaning, then it sounds as if He doesn't know. Lk. 19:15 suggests that perhaps He doesn't know; the Lord calls the servants "that he might know how much every man had gained by trading". He is ordained *to be* judge of all (Acts 10:42). However, as Lord of Heaven and earth, with all power given to him, this seems unlikely- although it must be remembered that in the same way as God is omnipotent and yet limits His omnipotence, so He may limit His omniscience. The shepherd sees the difference between sheep and goats as totally obvious. It needs no great examination. Surely the idea is that the judge, the omniscient Lord of all, will act at the judgment *as if* he needs to gather evidence from us and thereby reach his verdict. The parables give this impression because they surely describe how the judgment will feel to us.

The believer is called to his Lord to receive his pounds, and is called to Him in judgment at His return (Lk. 19:13,15). The repetition of the idea of being called to our Lord surely suggests that our calling to Him in the first place is in fact a calling to judgment. See on Mt. 13:47.

19:16 *And the first came before him-* He comes to us and the faithful come to Him. This will have a literal element to it. When we know for sure that the Lord has come, we will have the choice as to whether to go to

Him immediately or delay. Those who go immediately will be confirmed in that by being snatched away to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16,17). One of the great themes of Matthew's gospel is that various men and women 'came to Jesus' at different times and in a variety of situations. The Lord uses the same term to describe how at the last day, people will once again 'come unto' Him (Mt. 25:20-24). The same Jesus whom they 'came before' in His ministry is the one to whom they and we shall again come at the last day- to receive a like gracious acceptance. He will judge and reason the same way He did during His mortality.

*Saying: Lord, your minas have made ten minas more-* The purpose of the judgment is for our benefit, to develop our appreciation and self-knowledge. This is perhaps reflected by the ten pound man saying that the Lord' minas had gained, had worked to create (Gk.) the ten he could now offer. The man who achieved five pounds uses a different word in describing how the mina given him had made five minas, while the men in Mt. 25:20,22 use yet another word to say the same thing. This is surely a realistic picture, each of the faithful comes to the same conclusion, that what spirituality they have developed and the work of the Spirit which they did is an outcome of the basic Gospel given to each of us at our conversion; yet they have used them in different ways and they express this same basic idea in different words.

All those who will be in the Kingdom will feel that really we should not be there, we don't deserve it, we will be hesitant to enter it and therefore Christ will have to almost make us go into the Kingdom. It's the same in the parables of Matthew 25, at the judgment Jesus will praise the righteous for doing so many good things, and then they will disagree with him, they will say 'No, we didn't do that, really we didn't', and He will say 'Yes, in my eyes, you did'. Their good works had not been consciously done. This is surely what the Lord was driving at in saying that our left hand must not know what the right hand does. We aren't to be self-consciously brooding on our own generosity. It would seem that with a spirit of amazement and surprise the man says 'Your minas gained [more] minas!'. It's the self-righteous, those who think they have done so much and therefore they must be in the Kingdom, who will be rejected.

"Made" translates *poieo*, a very common word; but it is used by the Lord, again in talking about His servants, in saying that the faithful servant will be found 'doing' care to his brethren (Mt. 24:46). And the word is twice used about 'doing' good unto the least of Christ's brethren, and this being the basis for our judgment (Mt. 25:40,45). Again we see that our work / trading involves fruitfully sharing the spiritual riches we have received with others. It's worth noting that this teaching is alluded to in the record of the woman anointing the Lord's feet; and all the records of it use the same Greek words to describe it. She "did it" (*poieo*, Mt. 26:12,13), she

"worked" (s.w. "traded") a good work ['trading'] on the Lord (Mt. 26:10). It's as if her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth for the Lord was in fact smart trading in the spiritual sense. The story line implies that we can add to the total wealth of the Lord Jesus. Yet the extension of His glory, the progress of His work, depends upon us, and we are left to our own initiative in this. This is the meaning of the element of 'absence' of the Lord, and the immediacy of His leaving the servants with such huge amounts of silver without instructing them specifically how to use them.

This idea of using one's own initiative was more startling then than it is now. Today, students are 'trained' to think for themselves, be creative, develop their own opinions, push forward their own independent research, using question / problem-based learning as a paradigm for their education. 'Education' in the first century wasn't like that at all. The idea was that "every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). The idea was that a person born into a certain social situation was trained to take their place in society, given that 'station and place' into which they had been born. Initiative in that sense was not encouraged; it was all about training up a person to correctly fulfil societies' expectation of them. The idea of being personally taught by the invisible Master / teacher Jesus, becoming like Him rather than like the person whom society expected, being given talents by Him which we are to trade and multiply at our initiative (Mt. 25:15-28)... this was all totally counter-cultural stuff. What was so vital in the Mediterranean world was that a person achieved conformity to accepted values. Cicero advised that in any good presentation of a legal case or encomium, emotions and passions shouldn't be referred to. Individualism was seen as a threat to tradition and the collective society. The huge New Testament emphasis on becoming disciples, learners, of an invisible Lord, Master and teacher located in Heaven, serving Him alone, worried about *His* standards, perceptions and judgment of us- that was and is so totally opposite to the expectations of society. People were educated to be embedded in society, rather than to come out of their world and live in the new world in which Christ was the light, and all things were made new in a new creation, a new set of values.

19:17 *And he said to him: Well done, you good servant. Because you were found faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities-* 1 Cor. 4:2 speaks of us as stewards being "found faithful" in this life by our actions; there is a definite sense in which the Lord's judgment and assessment of our stewardship is ongoing in this life. The judgment process, from His perspective, is now. And "we make the answer now".

"In a very little" (*elachistos*) is the very same word found later in Matthew 25, when we read that the final judgment will be based around how we have treated "the very least" of the Lord's brethren (Mt. 25:40,45). The minas we have been given relate to them- how we have used them, what

we have done for them, how we have served them with the riches given us by the Lord. There is obviously a connection between the manner in which we rule over the "few things", and how we shall be given "many things" to rule over in the Kingdom age. Clearly what we are doing now is in essence what we shall eternally be doing, but on a greater level. If our lives are centred merely around ourselves and doing what we want, developing ourselves, rather than developing the Lord's work and doing *His* work, then we will be out of step with the life eternal. We are to start living that now. And then we shall live it eternally. Our care for the little one or two individuals now is related to how we shall care for whole cities in the Kingdom.

The parable describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities. This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26; 1 Chron. 6:61 (all of which are in the context of the priests receiving their cities), and "five cities" in 1 Chron. 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the whole nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the NT is alluding to this OT background of the land being prepared by the Angels for Israel to inherit (Ex. 15:17 Heb.; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10 Heb.). We must be careful not to think that our promised inheritance is *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is only eternal life.

The reward was way out of proportion, both to what had been given, and to what they had achieved with it: ten cities! The Master's words almost seem to be a gentle rebuke: "Because you were found faithful in *a very little*, have authority over ten cities"; "you have been faithful over a *few things*, I will make you ruler over many things" (Mt. 25:23). The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms and parameters, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "many things" of Mt. 25:23); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

19:18 *And the second came, saying: Your minas, Lord, have made five minas-* The faithful in the parable of the talents / pounds realize that

"your minas have made" what spirituality they can now offer Christ at the judgment. They understand that their growth was thanks to that basic deposit of doctrine delivered to them. Each of us have been given different aspects of Christ's character to develop from the same basic doctrines, and therefore we will each have an individual discussion with our Lord. We shouldn't think of the judgment as being a process which is more or less identical for each of us. This misconception arises from failing to recognize that our meeting with Christ is only *likened* to a human judgment court. The similarities aren't exact.

We are to "gain" or 'make' more for the Lord on the basis of what He first gave us. The Greek word translated "made" is elsewhere usually used about gaining men and women for Christ- a wife 'gains' her unbelieving husband (1 Pet. 3:1); Paul sought to 'gain' people for the Lord (1 Cor. 9:19-22); we 'gain' a lost brother by pastoral effort with him (Mt. 18:15). Be that going for a coffee with him, sending an email, trying to imagine his feelings and approaching him appropriately.

Significantly, the other usages of this word translated 'gain' are about the folly of gaining material wealth, even gaining the whole world. We can't be successfully about the Lord's business, of gaining folks for Him, if we are selling our soul to gain material things. That's the point. We were "delivered" talents by God. It's the same word used about how the Lord Jesus exhaled His last breath on the cross; how "that form of doctrine" was 'delivered' to us before baptism (Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 15:3; Jude 3). We can't say we have no talents. Christ died for you, for me; He bowed His head towards each of us personally and gave us His last breath, the riches of His Spirit within us who stand before His cross.

19:19 *And he said to him: And you are to be over five cities-* See on :17. We think of how in the Kingdom, "five cities shall speak the language of Canaan and swear to Yahweh" (Is. 19:18). Such groups will be under the authority of someone who in this life traded their talents well. Again we note the total lack of proportion of the rewards; a faithful slave who took some initiative and was faithful during the master's absence becomes a ruler over cities. And this is the lack of proportion we shall experience. What this means is that every moment of human life today has huge and eternal significance, and will have moment far beyond anything we can now imagine. The gross lack of proportion doesn't mean that there is no relationship between the trading of this life and the nature of our eternity. There is; and that is the point. Our entire lives therefore should be bent toward spiritual things and the Lord's work. No longer can this be mere religion, a Sunday hobby, a social network. We are right now forging the nature of our eternity. The trading of the minas refers to our usage of the Spirit for the benefit of others, to God's glory. It is related to what we

shall be eternally doing; for our authority over the nations is in order to help them to glorify the Lord.

We have already been made ruler "over" and in the Lord's household in order to feed the members (Mt. 24:45 s.w.). Our whole church experience, our relations with others and efforts for them, is to prepare us for being made ruler over all the Lord's goods, over whole cities of persons in the Kingdom. We cannot of course accurately imagine what new dimensions await us, but all we can say is that we are in training for them, and that training involves the care of others within the household now; for this is in essence what we shall eternally do on a far grander scale. To separate ourselves from that household, or cast others out of it, is to deny both ourselves and others the environment required for us to be prepared for eternity.

There is an element of unreality in the parable of the minas: wise use of a few coins results in power over several cities. We are left to imagine the men marvelling in disbelief at the reward given to them. They expected at most just a few minas to be given to them. And in their response we see a picture of the almost disbelief of the faithful at their rewards. In that moment we will grasp the deep significance of all we did in this life. And we need to perceive that now. For at times it can appear that we live the lives which our secular neighbours live, smelling, eating, acting, experiencing more or less as they do; just that we have religious beliefs which they don't share. But this is an illusion. Our lives, decisions, attitudes, actions and spirit are freighted with an eternal significance which is not so in their lives.

The Lord gave a related teaching in Lk. 16:10-12: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?". What is given to us now is to test our faithfulness. If we don't perceive what we have been given, and so many believers tell me they are unsure about this, *then you need to ask the Lord to show you*. Urgently. And give your life to developing those things. The Luke 16 passage appears to say that in this life, we are stewards of the Lord's wealth, just as in this parable of the minas; but if we manage that well, then we will be rewarded with wealth which is actually and personally our own. For eternity. That 'wealth' will be of the same nature as that given to us by the Lord initially. Here we have a rare insight into the nature of our eternity. There is nothing that is the Lord's which will not be shared with us and in some sense give to us to exercise our initiative over.

The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our

limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "cities" of His Kingdom); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

19:20 *And another came, saying: Lord, behold, here is your mina-* So many of the parables build up to a final climax which is the essence of the point the Lord was trying to get across; and this 'end stress' is also seen in the talents parable. The warning is not to be like the man who didn't have the vision to do anything with his mina, but returned it unused to the Lord. This perhaps is our greatest temptation in our postmodern age of passivity, of staring at computer screens and clicking a mouse. "Behold, here is your mina" suggests an air of confidence in this man; he really didn't get it, that he was asked to trade what he'd been given. The fact he had retained it pristine appears to have been his reason for thinking that he ought to be accepted, or at least, didn't ought to be condemned. The story line penetrates deep into the mentality of many small time Protestant sects, according to which the ultimate test of loyalty to the Lord is whether we have retained our understanding of whatever curious or specific interpretations were entrusted to us via the charismatic founder of the sect. This man thought that that was all there was to it. He didn't spend it on himself, he wasn't like the prodigal son. But too late he was to learn that sins of omission are the ground for condemnation. To do nothing with God's Truth is described by the Lord as 'wickedness'. The grammar emphasizes personal possession: *You have what belongs to You*. As if to say 'I didn't steal it! It's yours, and it remains yours'. But the whole point was that the Lord had given the talents to the servants and gone away- they had to trade in their own name, as if they were theirs. We're not simply receptacles of intellectual truths which are to be preserved for the sake of it until the end of our days. That would be of itself pointless, a kind of mind game played between God and man for no ultimate purpose. We are given God's Truth, the riches of Christ, in order to use it for others; the whole talk of 'preserving the Truth in its purity' is dangerously close to inculcating the mentality of the one talent man- the mentality that led to his condemnation.

*I kept it laid away in a piece of cloth-* The judgment of the righteous comes before that of the rejected. The faithful respond first to the news that 'He's back', and their willingness to go and be with Him is effectively their judgment. Those who delay are the unworthy and are therefore judged slightly later.

One of the Lord's pen pictures of the rejected included that of the man who thought that because he had preserved the mina (the basic doctrines

of the Gospel) intact, therefore he was entitled to a place in the Kingdom. We are left to imagine him half-proudly, half sheepishly, holding it out to the Lord (Mt. 25:25). But he should have traded with his pounds (Lk. 19:13 RV)- done something with it all. The crowds hung upon Jesus' every word and teaching; it was so fascinating for them, so wonderful (Lk. 19:48 RV); and yet they still crucified Him. Those words, those wonderful ideas, didn't pierce deep within.

In the culture of the orient, it was not usual for a person to keep money in a cloth. Their culture was to trade and barter with what they had. That a man should just bury such a talent was therefore unreal for the original hearers. The point of this unreality is surely that spiritual laziness is so bad. It was better to have traded and lost through genuine mistakes, through naivety, through the betrayal and deception of others, than to simply *do nothing*. I fear, really fear, that our Christian culture has bred for many of us a 'do nothing' culture- which is exactly what this element of unreality is warning against. We can delegate responsibility to church committees, to others, to our leaders; or we can do nothing out of fear, fear of making a mistake, fear of taking a risk, fear of what other brethren may think of us... all the time denying this principle of Divine delegation. And it might be added that the 'do nothing' man of the parable emphasized that the talent or money was not *his*; he returned to his Lord what was his ["your [singular] mina"]. In order to trade it, or even to put it in the bank and get interest, he had to take personal ownership of it. And this he failed to do. And it is just this that we are being asked to do by our Lord- that His truth, all that He has given us, is in a sense *ours* now, to be used on our initiative, for His glory and service. Indeed, the reward of the faithful will be to be given *more* of their Lord's riches in the Kingdom, with which likewise to use their initiative in order to bring Him glory. We are left to think how the story might have gone on- the faithful were given *more* talents and they go away and do, in the Kingdom age, what they did in this life- using what they were given for *His glory and service, on their own initiative*.

We are *expected* by the Lord to realize that our relationship with Him means total commitment to His cause. In this sense Jesus is a demanding Lord. Thus when He gave the talents to His servants, He doesn't tell them to trade with them; it seems that the one talent man is making this point when he says 'You gave me your money to look after, and I looked after it, I didn't steal it; you're unreasonable to think I should have done anything else with it, you're expecting what you didn't give'. And the Lord is; He expects that if we realize we have the honour of knowing His Truth, we should get on and do something with it, not just keep it until He comes back. He doesn't have to ask us to do this; He takes it as being obvious. The anger of the rejected man comes over as genuine; he really can't understand his Master. He's done what he was asked, and now he's

condemned because he didn't do something extra. He was a Lord that man never knew- until all too late. You can imagine how you'd feel if someone gives you some money to look after, and then expects you to have doubled it, although he didn't ask you to do anything with it.

19:21 *For I feared you-* Fear of the judgment of others is a source of false guilt. It is this which militates against the true and free life of which the Lord speaks so enthusiastically. We fear showing ourselves for who we really are, because we fear others' judgments. This fear makes us uncreative, not bearing the unique spiritual fruits which the Lord so eagerly seeks from us and in us. The Lord said this plainly, when He characterized the man who did nothing with his talents as lame but truthfully saying: "I feared you". Think about this: What or whom was he afraid of? His fear was not so much of his Lord's judgment, but rather perhaps of the judgments of others, that he might do something wrong, wrongly invest, look stupid, mess it all up... And thus John writes that it is fear that leads to torment of soul now and final condemnation. The Lord's words in the parable are almost exactly those of Adam. The rejected one mina man says 'I was afraid, and so I hid *my mina*'. Adam said: 'I was afraid, and I hid *myself*'. The talent God gave that man was therefore himself, his real self. To not use our talent, to not blossom from the experience of God's love and grace, is to not use ourselves, is to not be ourselves, the *real* self as God intended.

*Because you are a hard man-* The problem was the man's wrong attitude and laziness to do anything. The prodigal son was given much of his Father's wealth, and he wasted it rather than trading it. But he recognized the Father's grace and was prepared to work just as a servant. And this attitude was his salvation. So this man's rejection wasn't simply because he had failed to do any trading.

Another take on this is that there is a sense in which the Lord is indeed a "hard man", a demanding Lord, His expectations were (and are) high. And yet His parables reveal an immense sympathy and empathy with our weakness. In a normal human situation, it would be difficult to build a relationship with someone who had such apparently contradictory trends in His character. Perhaps we have the same problem in our struggle to know the Lord. He never denied that He came over in some ways as "a hard man" with high expectations; all He said was that seeing this was the case, we ought to act accordingly (Mt. 25:24). And yet He is also a man of grace and understanding far beyond anything reached by anyone else. He is truly the Jesus who understands human weakness. And note that He is described even now as "the man Christ Jesus", able to feel the pulse of our humanity. This, in passing, opens a window into what Divine nature will be like: we will be able to completely feel the human

experience, to the extent of still bearing the title 'men' even in immortality.

*You demand what you did not deposit, and reap that which you did not sow-* He clearly didn't know nor love his master; or else he would not have had this inappropriate fear. He is accusing him of being a typical absentee landlord. But his master was not away enjoying himself. He had gone to receive a kingdom and to return and share it with his workers. The man who didn't develop as he should have done accuses the Lord of reaping what He didn't sow. But the Lord does sow the seed of the basic Gospel, as the parable of the sower makes clear. The point is that the unworthy fail to let that seed bring forth fruit, they fail to see that the Lord expects fruit from those doctrines they have been given. But they fail to see the link between the basic Gospel and practical spirituality; they feel he's reaping where He didn't sow. They are in denial of "the power thereof", whilst theoretically possessing it. The Lord will require his own, i.e. that which he has sown, the basic Truths of the Gospel, the gift of the riches of His grace, His Spirit, with usury (Lk. 19:23). The parable of the tiny seed moving the great mountain was surely making the same point; the basic Gospel, if properly believed, will result in the most far reaching things (Mt. 17:20 cp. 13:31).

The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19;13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment. If reaping refers to judgment [which it clearly does in the Lord's teaching], then the man could hardly claim to have known the Lord on the basis of how He reaps. Because the man hadn't experienced the Lord's reaping. The man says he 'knows' [*ginosko*] the Lord is like this; the Lord answers that if indeed the man has 'known' [*eido-* which more means to see / experience] that He is like this, then he should have acted accordingly. The suggestion may be that even if a person's understanding of the Lord Jesus is slightly wrong, the important thing is to live within and according to that understanding, even if it involves breaking some Divine principles [lending for interest]. If the desire to respond to the Lord's gift was there, the desire to progress His work, then although such response was not ideal and not as good as that achieved by the other two servants, then the Lord would accept it. The language of sowing, reaping and gathering is all described using the same Greek words in the Lord's comment that the birds don't do these three things, and yet God still

feeds them (Mt. 6:26). Perhaps the man was making a garbled, incoherent attempt to say that he had understood those words of the Lord to mean that He was somehow going to be an unreasonable judge with unreal expectations, therefore he had done nothing, although he had not spent the talent [unlike the prodigal son- who desperately wanted to be with the Father]. We may be intended to understand his reasoning as being 'You created birds who don't sow, reap nor gather into barns, they just expect food. And God thinks that's good. So, He is like what He creates'. And perhaps the man also had in view Jn. 4:38: "I sent you to reap that whereon you bestowed no labour. Other men laboured...". The harvest of people was reaped by those who hadn't fully worked for it, and the man desperately tries to turn that around to justify his own lack of action. Such desperate twisting of Bible verses can be seen at every hand today, as people wriggle by all means to justify their inaction and selfishness.

*And gathering where you did not scatter seed-* The Lord is clearly the sower of seed, the seed of the word of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:3). But the man is complaining that the Lord 'reaps' or calls to judgment those who had not received that seed. That is not the case- for knowledge of the Gospel is what makes responsible to judgment. The Lord could have corrected him by reminding him of the sower parable. But He doesn't. He reasons with the man according to the belief system which he claims to have, assuming for a moment that it is in fact true. His whole style ought to be programmatic for us in our frequent encounters with those who misuse Scripture and the Lord's words. The Lord does *not* expect a harvest from ground He has not sown; and in any case, the man had heard the word, received the talent. He was ground which had been sown, and the Lord could therefore expect a harvest from him. Like many people today, he started to raise philosophical questions about the fate of those who have not heard, and justified his own inaction [as one who definitely *had* heard and been called] on the basis of his doubts as to the Lord's justice in dealing with those who had *not* been called. Truly these ancient teachings speak to the heart of postmodern man today.

"Gathering" was highly relevant to the man, for the language of 'gathering' is often used about the gathering of God's servants to judgment (Mt. 3:12; 13:30; 25:32). The man was implying that his 'gathering' to judgment was unreasonable because the Lord had not sown in his land, had not strawed where he has. He felt he was being gathered to give an account when the Lord had given him nothing to account for. And yet the obvious fact was, the elephant in the room, that the Lord had given him minas, 20 years' wages, \$1 million. And yet the man reasoned as if he had not been given anything to account for. He totally refused to perceive the immense value of what he had been given. And this is so true for us- we for whom Christ died, the blood of God's Son shed, we who have been called to eternity, who by status are "saved" and

showered with all spiritual blessings... can complain that we have not been given anything. Because in our minds we have buried it away, and reason as if we never received it. Here again, the Lord's ancient words pierce to the core of modern Christian self-perception.

The Greek *diaskorpizo* can mean 'to scatter' and can therefore be used about sowing; but it also has the specific meaning 'to winnow'. In this case, the picture would be of a man who has not winnowed and yet expects to come and gather up wheat. Again, the man may be attempting to twist the Lord's words about 'gathering wheat into His barn' (Mt. 13:30, repeating John's words of 3:12). His idea would be 'You expect the wheat to be waiting for You without even winnowing it'. But of course the point was that winnowing represented judgment, and this was exactly what the Lord had come to do. But in His grace, the Lord doesn't make that obvious point, but runs with the man's words and reasoning and shows him that however wrong his imaginations were about the Lord, he should have acted according to them if he truly loved his Lord. But he hadn't done so; because he was selfish and lazy.

19:22 *He said to him: Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant-* The Lord's only other reference to a wicked servant is in the parable of the wicked servant who runs up a huge debt, is forgiven, and then refuses to forgive a far smaller debt, putting the debtor in prison (Mt. 18:32). The two men are clearly intended to be compared. The one of Mt. 18:32 was dishonest with his Lord's money [for how else did he amass such a huge debt to his Lord? Was it not that he was found out for dishonesty?]; he was materialistic in the extreme; and he was incredibly ungrateful and unforgiving. He committed many sins. The "wicked servant" here does nothing wrong, is not overtly materialistic; but his sin of omission, meant that in reality he had done just the same as the man who committed so much wrong.

The Lord's parable was clearly alluding to a contemporary Jewish rabbinic parable later recorded in the Zohar Chadash, folio 47: "A certain king gave a deposit to three of his servants: the first kept it; the second lost it; the third spoiled one part of it, and gave the rest to another to keep. After some time, the king came and demanded the deposit. Him who had preserved it, the king praised, and made him governor of his house. Him who had lost it, he delivered to utter destruction, so that both his name and his possessions were blotted out. To the third, who had spoiled a part and given the rest to another to keep, the king said, Keep him, and let him not go out of my house, till we see what the other shall do to whom he has entrusted a part: if he shall make a proper use of it, this man shall be restored to liberty; if not, he also shall be punished". The point of contrast is that the Lord is far more demanding. The Jewish story praised the man who simply preserved the deposit. The Lord Jesus condemned

the same man for doing nothing positive with it. The third man in the Jewish parable was given the possibility of repentance. But the third man in the Lord's parable was condemned with no possibility of changing the verdict- for this life is our sole time of responsibility. The Lord is purposefully alluding to this parable, and deconstructing it. Passivity, 'holding on to the faith' in a passive sense, much glorified by both Judaism and Protestant Christianity, is what may be glorified in human religion; but it's exactly this attitude which will be the ground of condemnation.

*You thought that I am a hard man, demanding back what I did not deposit, and reaping that which I did not sow?*- The Lord's response could actually be translated as meaning: 'You [really?] saw Me reap where I did not sow...?'. The process of reaping definitely refers to the last judgment, and so the man had no basis upon which to make this claim, because he had never actually 'seen' the Lord act like that. But I prefer to understand the Lord as taking the man's ideas and working with them, without specifically correcting them- and saying that even if the man's understanding of Him was correct, then He expected him to act appropriately to that understanding. Instead of doing nothing.

The metaphor of a man travelling into a far country is a sign of His recognition that on one level, that is indeed how it will appear to us. And clearly the idea is based upon the experience of absent landlords, who left their estates in the hands of their servants and went away to enjoy the good life in some better part of the Roman empire. Such landlords were despised as non-patriotic and disinterested in the welfare of their people. And yet the Lord consciously employs this image concerning Himself. He is not ultimately like that, but through this choice of imagery He gives a nod of recognition towards the fact that indeed this is how it will appear to some. Joseph likewise appeared tough and disinterested to his brothers, when beneath that mask his heart was bursting for them; His whole plan of action was simply to lead them to repentance.

*19:23 Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest*- The Lord may have in view the money exchangers whom He so despised and whose tables He overthrew in Mt. 21:12. It's as if the Lord is saying that He was willing to make major concessions to the man- if he had done at least something, even if that 'something' was far less than ideal. A Rabbinic teaching claims that bankers should never be trusted and therefore "Money can only be kept safe by placing it in the earth" (*b. B. Mes'ia* 42A, quoted in R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) p. 954). The Lord is consciously deconstructing Rabbinic views. If we had more access to such contemporary texts, we would likely understand many of the more enigmatic and difficult passages of Scripture- probably they are alluding to and deconstructing contemporary writings.

The Lord will *receive or* collect back His own. Strong defines this as "to carry off, away from harm" (the same word is used in Heb. 11:19 about Abraham *receiving* Isaac from the dead). There is the suggestion that the Truth which the Lord has given us is valuable to Him, and He fears our losing it; those who lose the faith lose the personal possession of the Lord Jesus. But at the judgment, when we hand it back to the Lord, He (not to say, we) will have that deep knowledge that now we can't fail Him any more, we no longer have the possibility of causing harm and loss to the treasured wealth which has been entrusted to us. We need to remember, however, that there was no banking system as we have today. Lending money to exchangers was a highly risky business and often resulted in the loss of money; money was safer stored in the earth, as the man did. So the Lord's point was that he should have taken a risk; indeed, all such trading requires risk taking which may leave us looking foolish. But the Lord may be implying that if he had taken that risk for the right reasons, all ultimately would have worked out well.

"My own [money]" reminds us of the fact that He is Lord *of all*. This means He is owner of absolutely everything to do with us (Acts 10:36). At the judgment, this fact will be brought home. The Lord will ask for "my money... my own"; we will be asked what we have done with our Lord's money (Mt. 20:15; 25:27). All we have is God's; it is not our own. Therefore if we hold back in our giving and trading, we are *robbing God*. Israel thought it was absurd to put it like this: But yes, God insisted through Malachi (3:8-12), you are *robbing me* if you don't give back, or even if you don't give your heart to Him in faith. *And will a man rob God? Will a man...? We must give God what has His image stamped on it: and we, our bodies, are made in His image (Mt. 22:21); therefore we have a duty to give ourselves to Him. We are not our own: how much less is 'our' money or time our own! Like David, we need to realize now, in this life, before the judgment, that all our giving is only a giving back to God of what we have been given by Him: "Of your own have we given you" (1 Chron. 19:14). The danger of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'.*

Explaining how the man could have entered the Kingdom is surely the basis for the gnashing of teeth. To have it explained like that... is harder than any hell fire of classical imagination. He ought to have given the talent to the exchangers. Either he should've given it to the Gentiles, or he should have at least done something, in lending it to his Jewish brethren- even against the Law. Very possession of the minas meant we have to, we must, share it with others in some way- we are all preachers.

The man being told how he could have entered the Kingdom is after the pattern of rejected Adam and Eve having the way to the tree of life clearly shown to them after their rejection (Gen. 3:23,24). Again, notice how the

judgment is for the education of those judged and those who witness it. He will shew them how they should have given their talent, the basic Gospel, to others, and therefore gained some interest. This has to be connected with the well known prohibition on lending money to fellow Israelites for usury; usury could only be received from Gentiles (Dt. 23:20). Surely the Lord is implying that *at the least* this person could have shared the Gospel with others, especially (in a Jewish context) the Gentile world. This would have at least brought some usury for the Lord. This would suggest that issues such as apathy in preaching, especially the unwillingness of the Jewish believers to share their hope with the Gentiles, will be raised by the Lord during the judgment process. Of course, the Lord hadn't told the servant (in the story) to lend the money to Gentiles; he was expected to use his initiative. The overall picture of the story is that at least the man should have done *something!*

Alternatively, it could be that we are intended to understand that the Lord would even have accepted him if he lent money on usury, something which the Law condemned; if he'd have done *something*, even if it involved breaking some aspects of God's will... Instead, his attitude was that he had been given the talent of the Gospel, and he saw his duty as to just keep hold on it. He was angry that the Lord should even suggest he ought to have done anything else! We really must watch for this attitude in ourselves. He justifies himself by saying that he has "kept" the money (Lk. 19:20), using the word elsewhere used about the need to *keep* or hold on to the doctrines of the One Faith (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Rev. 6:9). He had done this, he had held on, he hadn't left the faith. And he thought this was enough to bring him to the Kingdom. Sadly, many understandings of spirituality has almost glorified this very attitude. Any who show initiative have been seen as mavericks, as likely to go wrong. The emphasis has been on holding on to basic doctrinal teaching, marking your Bible with it, attending weekly meetings about it (even if you snooze through them), regularly attending... And, son, you won't go far wrong. The Lord, in designing this parable as he did, had exactly this sort of complacency in mind. In view of the man's beliefs about the Lord, he still should've acted accordingly.

Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When did we see you...?" (Mt. 25:44). The thought that at least some of our deeds will be discussed with us at the judgment should surely make some impact on our present behaviour. Lk. 19:23 implies not only that there will be a discussion with our judge, but that Jesus will point out to the rejected what they should have done to be accepted.

The parables of the Kingdom speak of the eternal consequences of the judgment. The Lord will require His own at the judgment (Lk. 19:23). This

doesn't mean, as the one talent man thought, that He will require us to give back to Him the basic doctrines of the Gospel which we were given at conversion. The Greek means to exact regularly, in an ongoing sense (s.w. Lk. 3:13); Strong defines it as meaning "to perform repeatedly... not a single act". When the Lord examines our lives at the judgment, He will expect to keep on receiving the result of what we have achieved for Him in this life. This is the ultimate encouragement for us in our preaching and encouraging of others, as well as ourselves; what we achieve now will yield eternal, continual fruit to the Lord. See on Mt. 25:27.

19:24 *And he said to those that stood by: Take away from him the mina and give it to him that has the ten minas-* "Them that stood by" must surely be a conscious reference by the Lord to Zechariah's prophecy of the Angels as "these that stand by" Christ (Zech. 3:4,7); note that he too speaks in a judgment/reward context. If our Lord is referring to the Angels, then we have a fascinating picture of them taking away the opportunities given to the unworthy and granting them to the accepted. Their query of the amount of reward being given fits in with what we know about their limited knowledge, and the fact that our reward will be far greater than their present status (Heb. 1,2). Hence their reverent questioning of the extent of reward being given (:25) suggests that "them that stood by" somehow questioned the Lord's judgment; their sense of equality was not that of their Lord. They felt that the gloriously strong brother with his wonderful reward didn't need it to be made even more wonderful. "Them that stood by" could refer to the Angels, or to the way in which the judgment will in some sense take place in the presence of all the believers. The fact is, even with God's nature, it will be difficult to appreciate the principles of judgment which the Lord uses; and so how much more difficult is it today!

The man 'having' ten talents as his own is in sharp contrast with the way the one talent man speaks of how the talent is not his but the Lord's: "Here You have what is Yours". The Lord is making the point that the faithful will now personally own the talents they were first given, plus they will be allowed to keep for their personal, eternal possession what talents they made during the trading of this life. The progress achieved in this life will be kept eternally. The Lord's teaching here must be given its due weight.

19:25 *And they said to him: Lord, he has ten minas!*- See on Mt. 20:11. The "they" could be the disciples; or the Angels at judgment; or the faithful at judgment day who still do not fully understand all things. If it was the disciples who interrupted the parable, clearly not understanding it, we must compare this against how the Lord said that His parables were only not understood by the unbelieving Jewish world. So we see His grace

towards them, and their slowness to understand. If the "they" refers to saved believers at the last day, then we reflect that some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); the elder son is apparently accepted in the Father's fellowship, although his attitude to his weak brother is so wrong (Lk. 15:31); the wise virgins, apparently selfishly, won't give any oil to the others; some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?); some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25).

19:26 *I say to you, that to everyone that has, shall be given-* This repeats the Lord's earlier teaching in Mt. 13:10-12 about the giving of understanding to those who have some: "And the disciples came and said to him: Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered and said to them: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whoever has, to him shall be given and he shall have abundance, but whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even what he has". Clearly there is an upward spiral in spiritual life, and this will come to ultimate term in the outcomes of judgment day.

*But from him that has not, even that which he has shall be taken away from him-* This is a paradox. Does the rejected man have minas, or not? He did, of course, have a mina; but as far as the Lord is concerned, we only have what we have developed. If we don't develop, we have nothing; the fact we received the talent at baptism won't save us. It's only what a man has developed from that in the service of others which counts as truly "his". This likewise is the sense of "To him that has shall be given"; all we have is what we have developed.

"Taken away" is perhaps a special reference to the Kingdom of God being "taken away" [s.w.] from Israel and given to the Gentiles (Mt. 21:43). The same Greek word is used about the taking away of the rejected individuals at judgment day (Mt. 22:13; 24:39). But here, it is the unused mina that is "taken away". The man was therefore to be identified with the mina- it was to be him. And yet he is most careful to speak of the mina as not his, but the Lord's: "Here you have what is yours". The Lord intended that we identify with the mina, rather than see it merely as His.

At judgment day, the rejected who have nothing will find that even what they have is taken from them. This surely means that the spirituality they appeared to have, what they thought they had, actually they never had, and even the appearance of it will be taken away from them. We can appear to have spirituality, when in fact we have nothing, nothing at all. The man who built his house on the sand had the sensation of spiritual progress; he was building, he was getting somewhere, apparently.

Likewise Israel were an empty [fruitless] vine, but they brought forth fruit- to themselves. In reality they had no fruit; but they went through the fruit-bearing process (Hos. 10:1). In Jer. 5:13, God mocks the false prophets as being "full of wind", or 'ruach'- with which His true prophets were filled. This play on words reveals that spirituality is either the real thing, or a being filled with wind in such a way that apes the true spirituality.

19:27 *But bring here my enemies, and slay them before me, those who did not want me to reign over them-* See on Rev. 14:10. We do well to try to imagine the tone of voice in which the Lord spoke these words. For in :41,42 He weeps over Jerusalem at the thought of her coming judgment. They did not wish to be under His Kingship; and so they will not be in His Kingdom. They made the choice.

It is fairly certain that time will be compressed at the judgment seat; there will therefore be no problem in such an individual discussion between each of the responsible and Christ. Several Bible passages suggest a going through of *works*; and yet we know that the basis of acceptability with God is not works but rather faith. The judgment of our works seems not to be related to as it were weighing up our salvation chances. For salvation is a gift, unrelated to works. That's what grace is about. But our use of our talents will be related to who and how we will eternally be.

A case could be made that the word "but" suggests that the one talent man is saved and doesn't share in the condemnation of the wicked which will happen at the final judgment. The 'going through' of works is therefore for our benefit, to teach us- not as a basis upon which the Lord decides worthiness. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23).

19:28 *And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem-* It was as if the Lord was determined Himself to trade His wealth, regardless of whether others did. And for Him, this required death in Jerusalem. We note His feature of walking ahead of them; we are left with the image of them following, setting us a pattern.

19:29 *And it came to pass, when he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet-* 'The house of figs'. There is likely a connection to the incident when the Lord curses the fig tree (:19). Perhaps we are to assume that He hoped for figs in Bethphage too, and was likewise disappointed. Bethphage has even been given the meaning 'House of unripe figs', which would confirm this impression (See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 1903, reprint) p. 1132).

*He sent two of the disciples-* The question arises as to why He didn't simply take the two animals Himself. The practical answer would be that if He had gone further into Jerusalem to get them, then he would as it were have entered Jerusalem but not in the way He intended to, which was to consciously fulfil the prophecy about the humble King entering Jerusalem on a donkey. But that explanation throws the question one stage further back. Why was it specifically a donkey from that village and person which was required? Could He not have found one in Bethphage? The effort required to send two disciples ahead of Him to get the animals and then bring them back to Bethphage seems considerable, when donkeys were common enough. The answer is not clear, but it could be that there was an anonymous person who specifically wanted to give those animals to the Lord in order to fulfil that prophecy. The Lord knew this and had obviously discussed it with the owner previously, because the owner would recognize Him as "the Lord" (:31), and would provide them once he perceived the Lord wanted them. In this little incident we see therefore the extent the Lord will go to, now as well as then, in order to take up the initiative of those who love Him. If we take that initiative in service, the Lord will surely use it, and make every effort to do so.

*19:30 Saying: Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here-*

The Greek words translated "tied" and "untie" occur together several times, usually rendered 'bind' and 'loose'. Earlier, the idea of binding and loosing has been used about the way that the decisions and actions of believers can have eternal consequence upon others, and our bind and loosing is to some extent reflected in and confirmed by Heaven (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). This conception of binding and loosing was surely intended by the Lord. Verse 4 makes clear that all this was done in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Messiah would come to Zion riding on a donkey and her foal. But that prophecy had to be consciously fulfilled. Whether or not the Messianic prophecies were fulfilled was therefore left to the initiative of the Lord and His followers. And it's the same in our last days- if, e.g., we choose to fulfil the prophecy that the Gospel must go into all the world before the end comes, then in that sense the actual time of Christ's coming is left in our hands. There are other Messianic associations with a donkey- Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed on a donkey (Gen. 22:3,5); Solomon rode to his coronation on David's donkey (1 Kings 1:33-44).

The question arises as to why both a donkey and foal were required. He surely didn't straddle both at the same time. He rode on the donkey whilst the colt followed. Perhaps this has reference to the way that the Lord's final entry into His Kingdom would be on the backs of both Jews and Gentiles; the immature foal with no rider would therefore look

forward to the Gentiles. Another possibility is that "A donkey, *and* on a colt, the foal of a donkey" is a Semitic parallelism effectively meaning 'A donkey, actually, a foal of a donkey'. If that's the case, then the Lord rode the foal of a donkey, not yet broken in. It would've been hard to ride, probably trying to throw Him; His journey into the city would've been almost comical, because He would nearly have been thrown and would've hardly made a sedate, solemn procession. The parallel records stress that no man had ever sat upon it (Mk. 11:2; Lk. 19:30). This would've spoken clearly of the difficulty of the Lord's entry to His Kingdom whilst riding on Israel. However, Mt. 21:2 speaks in the plural, of loosing the animals and bringing *them* to the Lord. It may simply be that a donkey nursing her foal, distracted by this, was the most unmilitary, non-glorious form upon which the Lord could've entered Jerusalem. Perhaps it was a parody of how triumphal entries require a King to be on a charger pulling a chariot. The Lord had a donkey instead of a charger, and instead of a chariot being pulled by the charger, the foal was in tow behind the donkey.

Mk. 11:4 says that the donkey was tied at a gate, at "a place where two ways met". This translates the word *amphedon* which in the LXX (e.g. Jer. 17:27) is used for a palace. Herod had a palace on the Mount of Olives and maybe this is what is being referenced. It could be that the donkey and foal were provided by Herod's servants, because Joanna was a disciple of Jesus who provided for Jesus from her "substance"- and she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3). In this case, the Lord was further parodying a King's triumphant entry by riding upon Herod's donkey.

19:31 *And if anyone asks you: Why do you untie him? You are to say: The Lord has need of him-* God in a sense is in need of man, just as Jesus was, or allowed Himself to be. See on :30.

19:32 *And they that were sent went away and found as he had said to them-* This is to note their obedience to an otherwise very strange command. They surely secretly hoped that He would achieve a dramatic Messianic salvation. And He was teaching them that that salvation was not now, and He was deconstructing the whole idea of a triumphal entry, as noted on :30. It is to their credit that they humbled themselves beneath this idea.

19:33 *And as they were untying the colt, the owners of it said to them: Why do you untie the colt?-* This was all clearly part of a prearranged plan, as noted on :30. But there was a purpose in it. The Lord wanted them to ask the question as to why ever He was making a triumphal entry on a colt and not a charger. Perhaps the stress was on the word "colt", when perhaps a finer horse stood there. He wanted them to realize that He was deconstructing a triumphal entry.

19:34 *And they said: The Lord has need of him-* The usage of the term "the Lord" suggests that the owners were also believers. I suggested on :30 that they were believing members of Herod's household.

19:35 *And they brought it to Jesus, and they threw their garments upon the colt and sat Jesus on it-* Using their garments as saddles. The fact both animals were saddled (Matthew) was to make the point that one rider was missing. For according to the other Gospels, the Lord sat upon the colt. The mother donkey was saddled, but without a rider. This added to the strangeness of the spectacle. The missing rider was perhaps a reference to how Israel had not as a whole responded in bringing Messiah to Zion. Maybe it referred to the Gentiles who had yet to be converted. Or perhaps to the fact that Israel had rejected John the Baptist and he had been killed- and therefore there was no Elijah prophet bringing Messiah into Zion. Elijah was the great horseman of the Divine chariot (2 Kings 2:12; 13:14; he is called the "horsemen" plural, but this is an intensive plural for 'the one great horseman'). Elijah was the chariot horseman, the one who was to ride on the horse which pulled the chariot in which there was Messiah [this was a Rabbinic understanding of the Elijah prophet]. But he was strangely absent in this acted parable. The saddle was there for him, provided by the few disciples who had responded to John / Elijah; but he wasn't there. This absence of the Elijah prophet was surely indicative of the fact that John had not been the Elijah prophet for most of Israel- they hadn't responded properly to his message. Therefore the true triumphant entry of Messiah was yet future. This is why the phrase "bringing salvation" is excluded from the quotation of Zech. 9:9. It was not so much a 'triumphant entry', but a *parody* of a triumphant entry.

When they put their clothes on the colt and started mistakenly proclaiming Jesus as the triumphal Messiah entering Jerusalem to begin His political Kingdom, the Lord doesn't rebuke their misunderstanding. Instead, He defends them to the critical Pharisees (Lk. 19:35-37,40). He imputed righteousness to them, as He does to us today.

19:36 *And as he went, they spread their garments on the road-* Matthew says that "the crowd" did this. The crowds who accepted Him in the wrong way very soon rejected Him; so in a sense, they cut themselves off. And they did this because they misunderstood Him, expecting Him to give immediate deliverance.

Jn. 12:13 says they waved palm branches. But palms and the shout of "Hosanna" (Mt.) are associated with the feast of Tabernacles. And this was Passover, not Tabernacles. All the way through this brilliant visual stunt by the Lord, there was the message that He was not as they had imagined, He had come to die as the Passover Lamb, not to immediately give them the Tabernacles celebration which they wanted to see there and then.

The behaviour in this verse was exactly that associated with the triumphant entry of a victorious king. The much laboured account of the Lord's obtaining a donkey and her foal and thus riding into the city was really a studied parody of that whole conception of Messianic victory. For Him, the victory would be to hang lifeless upon a cross. True greatness was in humility. And instead of beaming with pride, Lk. 19:41 adds the detail that He wept over the city, knowing how they had rejected Him. According to Harry Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels*, "The rabbis had a saying: "If Israel be worthy, Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13); if unworthy, riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9)". So the entire triumphant entry was indeed a parody which sooner or later the Jews came to grasp. Hence their anger- for the whole incident declared them unworthy.

Whilst what the Lord arranged was indeed a parody of a triumphant entry, designed to highlight the importance of humility and sacrifice, He was surely conscious that He was acting out, however dimly, the prophesied future and ultimate triumphal entry of Messiah into Jerusalem and the temple, coming from the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4; Is. 62:11).

*19:37 And as he was now drawing near, at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works which they had seen, saying-* Jn. 12:16 specifically states that they misunderstood at this point. They were so ecstatic because they really believed that He was going to establish the Kingdom there and then. His previous parable about going away to receive the Kingdom had fallen upon deaf ears. The gospel records are transcripts of how the disciples preached the Gospel; and continually they emphasize their own weakness and slowness to understand, thereby reaching out to their hearers, urging them as it were to do better than they had done.

*19:38 Blessed is the King that comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*- As noted on :37, they thought that finally the Kingdom was being established. They failed to perceive that the Lord was mocking and deconstructing the whole idea of a triumphal entry, instead glorying in humility and the need to die on a cross in order to establish His Kingdom.

The Lord didn't turn round and correct them for their misapplication of Scripture. Neither did He reject them or call fire down from Heaven upon them because of their misunderstanding. He said nothing, and let the crowd live on in their misunderstanding and see His death – in order to teach them something about what was needed in order to enable the Kingdom. And the same 'long term' approach of the Lord is found in His dealing with the demons issue. The elder son in the parable falsely claims to God that he has never broken one of His commands; but although this is evidently untrue, the father (representing God) does not correct him in

so many words (Lk. 15:29–31).

God has inspired His word in order to interpret certain facts to us. This is further proof that we are not intended to insist on a strictly literal meaning to everything we read (for example, that the sun literally rises). Thus Matthew records that the people cried 'Hosanna' at Christ's entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:9). Seeing that first century Israel spoke Aramaic, this is doubtless what did actually come out of their lips. But Luke says that the same group of people shouted "Glory" (Lk. 19:38). Luke's Gospel seems to be designed for the Greek speaking world, and so he uses the Greek equivalent of 'Hosanna', even though they did not actually say that word. The way the New Testament quotes the Old with slight changes without pointing this out is another example of how God's word mixes interpretation with direct transmission of facts (e.g. Ps. 32:1-2 cp. Rom. 4:6-7). This fact is not irrelevant to the issue of demons. We have seen that the accounts of demons being cast out are framed in such a way as to show the supremacy of God's power over the vain traditions of the first century world.

*19:39 And some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to him: Teacher, rebuke your disciples-* Even though the disciples were so deeply mistaken and inappropriate, as explained above, the Lord always takes their side when they are under criticism. The same defensive, justifying Lord is ours too, and looks at our weaknesses and refusals to understand in the same way.

*19:40 And he answered and said: I tell you, that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out-* See on :39. Often Scripture alludes to or quotes other Scripture which may seem out of context, if we insist on seeing everything from our viewpoint of time. Thus Lk. 19:40 quotes Hab. 2:11 concerning the stones of apostate Israel crying out, and apparently applies it to the misguided acclamation of faithful men. Matthew particularly seems to quote Scripture which is relevant to the Lord's second coming as applying to His first coming. Indeed, the way the NT quotes the OT apparently out of context is a sizeable problem. There are times when we may quote or allude to the words of a Bible passage quite out of context, just because the words seem appropriate. And it seems the NT sometimes does just the same. Search and try as we may, the context seems just inappropriate. This may be explicable by understanding God to have the ability to take words from one time-context and insert them into another, in a way which to us is not contextual. *We* have no authority to do this; but *He* can. *He* can speak as if "the resurrection is past already"; but for us to do so is to deny the Faith.

*19:41 And when he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it-* His previous parable about slaying those who refused Him was therefore said

with deep sadness in His voice. 1 Pet. 2:12 defines the "day of visitation" as that of the Lord's return to earth to establish His Kingdom. But a similar idea is to be found in Lk. 19:41-44, where the Lord 'sees' or visits / views the city on 'this day'. See on Lk. 21:20-24.

*19:42 Saying: If you had known in this day, even you, the things which belong to your peace! But now they are hid from your eyes-* On :44 I will observe that the Lord has the potentials in view. The whole planned program of His death and the AD70 judgments could have been averted. The time of Zion's peace could have come there and then if they accepted Him on His true terms.

The pain that arises from knowing what might have been is so poignantly brought out by the grief of Martha and Mary over their brother's death- they knew that if Jesus had have been there, Lazarus wouldn't have died (Jn. 11:21,32). Jesus as God's Son had something of this ability to see what might have been- hence He could state with absolute confidence that if Gentile Tyre and Sidon had witnessed His miracles, they would've repented in sackcloth and ashes (Lk. 10:13). He lamented with pain over the fact that things would have been so much better for Jerusalem if she had only known / apprehended the things which would bring her ultimate peace (Lk. 19:42). The Lord Jesus was deeply pained at what might have been, if the things of God's Kingdom had not remained wilfully hidden from Israel's perception. His pain was because of realizing what might have been. In this He was directly reflecting the mind of His Father, who had previously lamented over Jerusalem: "O that you had hearkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river" (Is. 48:18).

*19:43 For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies shall set up a barricade around you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side-* These were the days that would come, when instead if they had accepted the Lord, there would have been days of peace, the Messianic Kingdom, when Israel would not be fenced in by Gentiles but would instead remove the barriers and go forth to the Gentiles with peace "on every side".

*19:44 And shall dash you to the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not leave in you one stone upon another-* The judgment of the leprous house was to be thrown down, stone by stone (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for

them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law.

*All this will happen because you did not perceive the time of your visitation-* Because Jerusalem knew not "the time of your visitation", she didn't perceive the things of "her peace" "in this day" (:42), *therefore* days of destruction would come upon her in AD70. The implication surely is that had Jerusalem accepted Jesus as Messiah, the events of AD70 need never have happened, and His first coming could have been the day of "visitation" to establish God's Kingdom. Of course God's program functioned differently because this never happened; but that doesn't take away from the fact that it was truly possible.

All major events in God's purpose have occurred within the approximate period when true students of the word expected them to - the Flood, the desolation of Jerusalem and its rebuilding, the Lord's first coming, the events of A.D. 70 etc. are all good examples. How much more then with the time of the second coming and the consummation of God's purpose? "The Lord God will do nothing, but he reveals his secret unto His... prophets" (Amos 3:7), and the purpose of their writing was so that we might understand. The Lord rebuked the Jews because they couldn't discern the signs that Messiah's first advent was with them (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44); and his first advent was a type of his second. The coming of judgment through the Babylonians was another type of the last days; and Israel were criticized for not perceiving the approach of that day, whereas "the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed time; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming" (Jer. 8:7). This means that as the natural creation have an inherent knowledge of the seasons, so God's people should have a sense of the time of the Lord's coming. The Lord said the same when he spoke of how our internal awareness of the approach of Summer should correspond to our certain knowledge of the Kingdom's approach.

The grace of Jesus and His Father, so great, so free, was a challenge for even the Lord to express in any verbal medium. The way He spoke was grace itself. He wept over the men of Jerusalem, sorrowing that their destruction must come because "you knew not the time of your visitation". He could have quite well said: "because you have rejected me...". But His grace was greater than to say that. The utter inappropriacy of our salvation is brought out time and again in His teaching. The oil lamp with the bruised reed and smoking flax which annoyingly filled the house with smoke was nurtured and tolerated in hope by this Lord of ours.

19:45 *And he entered into the temple-* This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple.

This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

*And began to throw out those that were selling there-* A verb elsewhere used by the Lord about condemnation (Mt. 8:12; 21:39; 22:13; 25:30). Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do.

The Lord had not long earlier described Sodom as the place where the wrong kind of buying and selling went on, and He had likened His generation to Sodom (Lk. 17:28). This, again, was hardly what the crowds expected to hear- a likening of their most sacred place to Sodom, and a prophecy of its destruction at the hands of the Gentiles. The Lord was thereby proclaiming the court of the Gentiles, where such trading was allowed to be conducted, as being as holy as the rest of the temple building. Note that in Matthew the Lord also expelled those who were *buying* the animals for sacrifice- ordinary Jews wanting to offer sacrifice. Sacrifices were therefore unavailable, because the Lord stopped the sale of them. This surely hinted at an ending of the Mosaic law in view of the Lord's upcoming sacrifice. This was all so much what the Jewish masses did *not* want to hear. There needed to be no more sale of animals for sacrifice; for the Lord was paying the price, and was the final sacrifice.

19:46 *Saying to them-* The Lord several times quoted an Old Testament passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus here He quoted Is. 56:7: "My house shall be called a house of prayer", leaving His hearers to continue: "...for *all* people". He recited Ps. 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise",

leaving them to complete: "...that you might still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger". For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

*It is written-* The Lord quotes from Is. 56:7, but the surrounding context of the quotation is relevant to the Jewish leadership who were present and deeply critical of the Lord's actions. Is. 56:10,11 condemns Israel's elders as "blind watchmen... dumb dogs... greedy dogs which can never have enough, shepherds that cannot understand, every one looking for gain". "Dogs" was understood as a reference to the Gentiles- and the Lord is saying that they are effectively Gentiles. Significantly, Is. 56:6 has spoken of "the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord... taking hold of His covenant". This is often how God works- for those who are sensitive to His word, the quotations given speak far more deeply. The potential for greater understanding is thereby given to those familiar with His word. This is one reason why I encourage perseverance in reading the Bible even if at the point of reading we feel we are not understanding much and simply building up a familiarity with the text. That familiarity can be a basis for later revelation to us.

*My house-* Just as the "feasts of the Lord" are described as "feasts of the Jews", God's house becomes "your house" (Mt. 23:38). They had hijacked God's religion for their own ends, just as so many do today.

*Shall be a house of prayer-* Luke uses the present tense, implying "is called". The Lord surely said both, His point being that prophecies of the future Kingdom are to be lived out by us in essence today.

*But you have made it a den of thieves-* The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfilment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfilment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry ((Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

This invites us to see the thieves who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable as the Jewish leadership, whose priests and Levites refused to help people after the damage they themselves had caused (Lk. 10:30). The thieves "stripped him of His clothing" just as they later did to the Lord Jesus. The Lord uses the same figure of thieves for the Jewish leadership in Jn. 10:1,8. The Lord quotes here from Jer. 7:11, which speaks of the temple being profaned by adultery and Baal worship, resulting in the Babylonian invasion. He is saying that Israel's hypocritical piety in His day was none less than Baal worship, and therefore the Gentiles would come and destroy that place.

19:47 *And he was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men of the people sought to destroy him-* I have argued elsewhere that the Lord gave His life, in the way and at the time He wished. It was not taken from Him. The role of His mock 'triumphal entry' was to whip up enthusiasm for Him- and then purposefully self-deflate it, so that the people would turn against Him and empower the Jewish leaders to do what they wished, in getting him crucified that Passover. This verse notes the success of His plans. He really was the master psychologist, the chess grandmaster who foresaw every possible move, and accommodate them all within a program and progression of events which He was supremely in control of. This is one reason why He could predict with such detail the events to be associated with His death that Passover.

19:48 *But they could not figure out what they might do, because all the people so hung upon his words-* See on Lk. 19:13. The Lord's mass popular support is what had apparently stymied their desire to murder Him on previous occasions. I suggest His purpose behind the mock 'triumphal entry' was to whip up that support to a crescendo, and then bitterly disappoint it. In this way, He left the Jewish leadership free to pursue their long held plans to destroy Him. And we observe too how unstable is human nature, how fickle is apparent devotion to the Lord... that the crowds could turn so quickly.

## CHAPTER 20

20:1 *And it came to pass, on one of the days he was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, there came to him the chief priests and the scribes with the elders-* Matthew says the Lord "entered" the temple to teach. "Entered" is *erchomai*, and is matched by the priests and elders 'coming' to Him, *proserchomai*. The impression is created of direct confrontation, head on. His teaching was the preaching of the Gospel- of the Kingdom of God. But His take on the good news of the Kingdom, as witnessed by multiple parables about the Kingdom, was that the principles of the future political Kingdom on earth must be lived now. All the people wanted was to see the Messianic Kingdom come literally. In chapter 19 we saw how He set up a mock triumphal entry to explain that this was not for now. And now He backs that up by explaining what "the Kingdom" at this stage was really all about in personal terms. Indeed, His view of the Kingdom was totally opposed to theirs. And so in His next parable, He explains that actually Israel must kill their king as they killed their prophets, in order for the Kingdom to come as they wished.

20:2 *And they spoke, saying to him: Tell us. By what authority do you do these things?-* Presumably they thought they had Him caught out, because *exousia* was supposedly solely with Rome. He could hardly say the Romans had given Him such authority. And yet if He said anything other than 'Rome', then He could be reported to the Roman authorities. However, their reference may have been to what we noted at Mt. 21:14- the Lord had held back the temple guard from arresting Him and stopping His forceful overthrowing of the temple traders. This question was quite to be expected of a man who had recently used violence to overthrow tables and force men off the premises. Who had given Him such authority?

*Or, who is he that gave you this authority?-* To this day this question is heard. People, especially religious people, find it so hard to accept that somebody can have a personal relationship with God which enables and empowers them to operate as sovereign free agents amongst mere men. This cry is especially heard from those who themselves think they have authority and seek to hold on to their petty power at all costs. It is the typical cry when someone obeys their Lord's command to baptize people, takes the initiative to extend fellowship to another etc.

20:3 *And he answered and said to them: I also will ask you a question. Now tell me-* It is not necessarily wrong to avoid answering a question- although few of us could do so in the spiritually and logically flawless way the Lord did here, let alone at a moment's notice.

The AV is mistaken in translating "If you tell me, I will tell you". The sense rather is: 'If you answer this question, then in that answer you will

have My telling you the answer to your question'. They finally answered in :7 that 'We cannot know' (Gk.).

20:4 *The baptism of John*- Perhaps John's message was so centred around the appeal for baptism that "the baptism of John" is being put for 'the teaching and ministry of John'. Or maybe the Lord has in view His own baptism by John. In this case, His reasoning would be that His authority came from the fact that He had been baptized by John. Seeing John's work was from God and had Divine authority, this meant therefore that the Lord was empowered by that baptism to operate with God's authority. If that is indeed what the Lord intended, then we have another window onto the perplexing question of why the Lord was baptized by John.

*Was it from heaven, or from men?*- Gamaliel uses the same logic in Acts 5:38,39 in urging the Jews to boil all the personal feelings and doubts down to a simple issue: Are these men and their work of God or man? This approach is helpful to us too, assailed as we are by unclarity about others. Is a man in Christ or not? Does God work through him or not? Is he of God or men? There is no middle ground here. This is what I submit concerning myself to those who doubt me, and it is the approach I seek to take with others with whom I have to engage in spiritual life. And Gamaliel rightly concluded that if something is of man and not of God, then we have little to worry about. Finally it will come to nothing. We should be concerned rather with the eternal consequence of refusing those who are clearly of God. If of God, we must accept them.

20:5 *And they discussed it among themselves, saying: If we shall say from heaven, he will say, why did you not believe him?*- This could imply they withdrew for discussion amongst themselves. But such a withdrawal would've been a sign of weakness. More likely we have here an insight into their own internal reasonings. In this case, the statement in :7 that they answered that they couldn't tell was uttered by each of them in turn as the Lord asked them individually.

20:6 *But if we shall say, from men, all the people will stone us*- The punishment for religious heretics. They all considered John as a prophet, whereas the chief priests and elders did not. We see here a marked difference between the people and their religious leaders. Indeed, the leaders despised the common people: "This people who know not the Law are cursed" (Jn. 7:49). And yet very soon now, the leaders would be apparently controlling the people to cry for the blood of Jesus. But this chapter so far has shown that this was not really the reason why the masses turned against Jesus. They turned against Him because of His dashing of their hopes and refusal to pander to their expectations, exemplified by His wilful parody of a triumphal entry into the city and

temple. The huge gap between the elders and the masses was so great that it cannot be credible that the elders managed to manipulate them so quickly to turn 180 degrees and to reject the Jesus whom their hero John had insisted was the Messiah.

*For they are persuaded that John was a prophet-* And yet the Lord had said that "the men of this generation" held John to be demon possessed, i.e. crazy (Lk. 7:33). We can on one hand feel and state respect for someone, whilst in reality not accepting them as any authority at all, and effectively considering them as if they are mad, not to be taken seriously.

*20:7 And they answered that they did not know-* They had set themselves up as defenders of the Faith, whose duty it was to analyse the claims of teachers and decide whether or not they were false prophets. But now they are beaten in fair intellectual fight. They can give no answer, and yet by saying they could not judge John's claim to be a prophet, they were abdicating the very role of assessors of teachers which they claimed to have, and which they were using against the Lord.

*20:8 And Jesus said to them: Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things-* He meant that they knew in their consciences and did not need Him to spell it out to them in words. This was again His style in His silence before His judges, and in His brief answer to Pilate: "You are saying it" (Lk. 23:3). The answer was in Pilate's own words rather than the Lord's.

*20:9 And he began to speak to the people this parable-* 'From where do you get your authority? What is your exact nature and relationship to God?' was answered by the parable of the servants who refused to receive the Son and give fruit to the owner (Lk. 20:9-16). The Lord could've answered: 'My authority? From God, He's my Father, I had a virgin birth, you know'. But He wasn't so primitive. Instead He appealed to them to realize their own responsibilities to their creator and to accept His authority by giving fruit to the Father. The absentee landlords at times demanded fruit in lieu of repayment of debt. Perhaps the idea was that Israel were deeply in debt to God. Matthew 21 prefaces this parable with the one about the son who refused to even work in the vineyard.

There are strong similarities between the Lord's parable and the song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7, especially in the LXX:

*"Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard* [The genre is significant; what begins as a joyful, idyllic harvest song turns into bitter disappointment and declaration of judgment]. *My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill* [The environment was ideal]. *He dug it up* [to dig was the work of the lowest servant, but God did this], *gathered out its stones* [the effects of the curse were ameliorated], *planted it with the choicest vine* ["the men of Judah"], *built a tower in its*

*midst, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? [Absolutely all has been done to enable our fruitfulness. The Father wants fruit above all- in the Lk. 20 parable, the owner seeks the actual fruit, rather than cash payment. This element of unreality serves to show His passionate interest in fruit] Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes? Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down [The downtreading of the temple at the hands of the Gentiles]. I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briars and thorns [The language of the curse in Eden. The land was as the Garden of Eden, but Israel sinned "as Adam"]. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it [the language of Elijah, prototype of John the Baptist]. For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness [the fruit required was justice and righteousness- instead, as Isaiah 5 goes on to explain, there was materialistic selfishness], but, behold, a cry of distress".*

*A man planted a vineyard-* The language of planting a vineyard and eating the fruit of it is used in 1 Cor. 3:6; 9:7 about *our* work of preaching. Paul was unafraid to interpret the parable on multiple levels. We are to be fruitful; but in our work of sharing the Gospel with others we are also the planters who come seeking fruit on our converts. The suggestion could be that the owner personally did the planting and preparing. I say this because Isaiah 5, upon which the parable is based, includes this feature- of the owner doing so much personally. Matthew's version stresses that all has been done so that we can produce spiritual fruit; but so often we excuse our lack of fruitfulness by blaming environment factors. The situation in our country, our town, workplace, marriage, family, health etc. And we can put huge effort into trying to change environment because we consider that we can be more fruitful for God in a different environment. But whilst passivity and fatalism are just as wrong, it must be accepted that our environment in the bigger picture has been uniquely and thoughtfully prepared by God so that we might be fruitful. For it is clear from the parable that our fruitfulness is God's most passionate desire and intention for us. He would hardly place us in any other environment, therefore, than one ideally prepared by Him in order to enable and enhance our fruitfulness.

*And rented it to husbandmen, and went into another country for a long time-* Not necessarily the ascension of the Lord Jesus. It could be a reference to God's entry of covenant with Israel, at which "God came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:20; 20:19) and then "ascended up on high" (Ps. 68:18). The Greek specifically means to go into a foreign, i.e.

Gentile, country. It is used of the prodigal son going into a far country (Lk. 15:13). Let us remember that the Son in the parable represents the Lord Jesus, the owner is clearly God. This going away is not therefore representative of the Lord's ascension to Heaven, although it appears to be used that way in Mt. 25:14,15; Mk. 13:34 ["the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey"]. This may just be the furniture of the parable, alluding to the common experience of absentee landlords. These were often characterized by being uncaring for their land; but this owner was particularly careful for his project to the point of obsession. He wanted the fruit, not money. It therefore may be part of the impression given, that the owner appears to be absent and disinterested- but in reality He is passionately interested. And this is exactly the position with God, who is perceived as somehow distant and passionless about His project on earth. There may also be the hint that even before He considered giving His precious vineyard to the Gentiles, which appears at the end of the parable, He had in fact initially envisaged this, and had in some form gone to the Gentiles right from the start of His project with Israel.

Initially, the parable would've got the hearers on the side of the labourers; because it was a frequent complaint that absentee landlords abused their tenants, who worked hard just to send cash off to the landlord in another country. But the parable twists around, so that after initially identifying with this group, the people came to see that it was they who stood condemned.

20:10 *And when the time came-* A phrase used by Matthew about the drawing near of the Kingdom at Christ's time (Mt. 3:2; 4:17). But by the end of His ministry, the Lord was warning that false teachers would wrongly claim that "the time draws near" (Lk. 21:8). Clearly He taught that the time had drawn near, but not come. He taught at the end of His ministry how He was as a man who had gone to a far country for a long time. This invites us to understand that with each appeal of the prophets, and of John as the last prophet, the time potentially could have come. God's purpose is thus open ended. Peter uses the same word to speak of how the end of all things is drawing near (1 Pet. 4:7), and Paul likewise (Rom. 13:12). It could have come in AD70- but again, a great delay, until our last days. This is why setting any date for the second coming is inappropriate- for it is a case of fulfilling preconditions, rather than awaiting a day fixed on a calendar. "The season" for fruit (Mk. 12:2) had indeed come, many times- all was potentially ready for it, but human failure meant there was no harvest.

*He sent-* The Greek *apostello* again encourages the apostles to see themselves as the equivalent of the Old Testament 'sent ones'- the prophets.

*To the husbandmen a servant, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard; but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty*

*handed-* The prophets (2 Kings 9:7 and often). Note that the prophets were sent from God, as the Lord Jesus was; but this doesn't imply they were in Heaven with God before their sending, and neither was the Lord.

20:11 *And he sent yet another servant, and him also they beat, and handled him shamefully, and sent him away empty handed-* When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25). The first servant could be the former prophets, the second servant the latter prophets; for Judaism strongly recognized this distinction. Beating, shaming, stoning and killing [according to Matthew's version] are Mosaic punishments for apostasy, and so the idea may be that Israel excused their lack of spiritual fruitfulness by judging as apostate the prophets who demanded this of them. This is typical- the unspiritual transfer their own anger with themselves and awareness of their own coming judgment onto others, whom they condemn as worthy of judgment and punishment.

20:12 *And he sent yet a third, and him also they wounded and threw him out-* Mk. 12:4 adds that the last servant was "wounded in the head", surely a reference to the beheading of John the Baptist and shameful treatment of his severed head. He was the last of the prophets; their ministry was until John the Baptist. Although we have just read that the crowds recognized John as a prophet (:6), in reality they didn't. They rejected his message of the true nature of Messiah. Mass enthusiasm for a Christian teacher is not the same as real belief and spirituality, and acceptance of the real spirit of Christ.

20:13 *And the lord of the vineyard said: What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. It may be they will respect him-* God sent His Son to Israel, thinking "they will reverence him when they see him" (Lk. 20:13 AV). But Isaiah 53 had prophesied that when Israel saw Him, they would see no beauty in Him and crucify Him. Yet God restrained that knowledge, in His love and positive hope for His people. Likewise Jesus, it seems to me limited His foreknowledge of Judas. He knew from the beginning who would betray him. One of the 12 was a traitor. Yet Judas was His own familiar friend in whom He trusted. "It may be they...", Gk. *isos*, is tantalizingly hard to understand. It could mean 'Perhaps'; or equally it could mean 'They will, surely'. We wonder of course how the Father could truly feel like this if He is omniscient. My suggestion is that He limits His omniscience in order to enter fully into our human experience; which means that His expressions of shock and disappointment are legitimate reflections of how He actually feels.

"My beloved Son" means that the joyful harvest song of Is. 5:1, the "song of my beloved", becomes the tragedy of "My beloved son".

20:14 *But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned one with another, saying-* That is, they conspired. This is quoting the LXX of Gen.

37:18. And the allusion is also to "*When they shall see him*, there is no beauty that they should desire him" (Is. 53:2). "Shamefully handled" (Mk. 12:4) is s.w. Is. 53:3 LXX "despised".

*This is the heir!*- The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "You both know me, and you know whence I am... You neither know me, nor my Father... when you have lifted up the Son of man, then shall you know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

*Let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours*- Their assumption therefore was that the landlord must have died, for otherwise, killing the son would not have given them the inheritance. They acted, as we can, as if God is dead; although they would never have admitted that. The apparent non-action of God can likewise lead to the wrong impression that He is effectively dead. Seizing a vineyard for personal possession reminds us of Ahab's actions in 1 Kings 21:15,16- making Naboth a type of Christ, and associating the Jewish religious leadership with wicked Ahab. However, Ahab did repent- and one wonders whether the Lord built in this allusion in reflection of His amazing hopefulness for Israel's repentance. The allusion to Ahab may have been born in the Lord's Bible-saturated mind by the way that Isaiah 5:6 spoke of rain being withheld from the vineyard, as happened in Ahab and Elijah's time. The confirmation of Israel in their evil way was brought to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ.

20:15 *And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them?*-Surely a reference to the Lord being crucified outside Jerusalem. In this case, the vineyard

specifically speaks of Jerusalem and the temple. Mk. 12:8 appears in English to suggest a different order: Took, killed, cast out of the vineyard. But the Greek text doesn't have to be read strictly chronologically. The killed-and-cast-out need not be chronological. Or it could be that the Lord is teaching that effectively, they had killed Him before casting Him out and crucifying; the essence of the cross was ongoing in His life. That is clear enough in a number of Gospel passages.

"Cast Him out" has obvious connection to the way in which the Lord was crucified outside the city limits of Jerusalem. But 'cast him out' is parallel with the stone being "rejected" by the builders (:17). The 'casting out' therefore speaks of religious rejection from the community. The same word is used of how the Lord was cast out of Nazareth (Lk. 4:29), and how believers would be cast out from Judaism (Lk. 6:22) and the synagogue (Jn. 9:34); and even from the legalistic church (3 Jn. 10 "casts them out of the church"). Any who experience being cast out of the visible body of God's people are thereby fellowshipping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Yet sadly the experience destroys many- when it can be taken as a share in His sufferings, knowing that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It is the same word used for the casting out of the rejected from the Kingdom to final condemnation (8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28); those who cast out of the vineyard, which is the Kingdom, will themselves be cast out of the Kingdom at the last day.

The invitation "O inhabitants of Jerusalem... judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard" (Is. 5:3) is matched by the rhetorical question: "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). This too was addressed by the Lord to Jerusalem's inhabitants.

*20:16 He will come and destroy these husbandmen-* The Lord spoke of how the owner Himself would "come and destroy these husbandmen". This is a shocking change in tempo- the owner has appeared impotent, distant and naive, to the point that the husbandmen considered He was effectively dead. They reasoned that if they killed the Son, then the vineyard would be theirs. But this is exactly the nature of Divine judgment. The God who appears effectively dead, at least impotent, distant and naive, will suddenly reveal Himself in direct judgment. We believe that now by faith, but it shall surely happen.

*And will give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said: God forbid-* The Lord will give the vineyard to the others. And yet He will come and destroy the vineyard, and the new nation He will choose will not just give Him some of the fruit, but will themselves become part of the vine, and themselves bear fruit to Him (Mt. 21:43; Jn. 15).

The Lord's initial Palestinian hearers were well used to the scenario of absentee landlords. The parables of Israel would have been easily

understood by them. The landlords lived far away, were never seen, and sometimes their workers took over the whole show for themselves. The Lord's parable of the absentee landlord in Lk. 20:9-16 alludes to this situation. He sends messengers seeking fruit from the vineyard, but the tenants abuse or kill them, and he does nothing. When his son shows up, they assume that he's going to do just as before- ignore whatever they do to him. After all, they'd got away with not giving him any fruit and ignoring his messengers for so long, why would he change his attitude? He was so far away, he'd been in a "far country" for a very long time (Lk. 20:9), they didn't really know him. The Lord asked the question: "What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). The obvious answer, from the context provided within the story, would be: "Judging on past experience, not much at all". But then the Lord presented the element of unreality in the story, as a sudden, biting trick of the tail: No, the lord of the vineyard would actually personally come and destroy them, and give the vineyard to other tenants. Even though his experience of having tenants farm his land had been a fruitless and painful experience that had cost him the life of his son. And it was that element of unreality that brings home to us the whole point of the story. The Father does appear distant and unresponsive to our selfishness, our rebellion, and our refusal to hear his servants the prophets. But there is a real judgment to come, in which He will personally be involved. And yet even His destruction of the Jewish tenants hasn't taken away His almost manic desire to have workers, in His desperate desire for true spiritual fruit. The parables of Israel surely speak encouragement to each of us. The parable of the absentee landlord has a telling twist to it. Absentee landlords who had never visited their land for ages, and found the people they sent to the property beaten up, would usually just forget it. They wouldn't bother. In the parable which draws on this, the Lord asks what the landlord will do (Lk. 20:15). The expected answer was: 'Not much. He got what he could, he was never bothered to go there for years anyway'. But *this* landlord is odd. He keeps on sending messengers when any other landlord would have given up or got mad earlier on. But God's patience through the prophets was likewise unusual. And then, when the tenants thought they must surely be able to get away with it because the Lord seemed so distant and out of touch... He suddenly comes Himself in person and destroys them. He doesn't hire a bunch of people to do it. He comes in person, as the Lord will in judgment. And instead of deciding he'd had his fingers burnt and giving up vineyards as a bad job, this Lord gives the vineyard to others- He tries again. And so the Lord is doing with the Gentiles.

20:17 *But he looked upon them, and said: What then is this that is written-* Mt. 21:42 "Did you never read in the scriptures". They spent their whole lives reading Scripture, and Ps. 118 was a well known Passover Hallel. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

*The stone which the builders rejected-* The Lord would be "rejected of the elders, chief priests and scribes" (Mk. 8:31 s.w.); indeed, "rejected by this generation" (Lk. 17:25).

*The same was made the headstone of the corner?-* If the builders rejected this stone, the implication is that another set of builders used it in another building, which became the temple of God. This is precisely the situation with the vineyard being taken away from the Jewish tenants and another group of workers being taken on. The quotation is seamlessly in context with the parable.

20:18 *Everyone that falls on that stone shall be broken to pieces, but on whoever it shall fall, it will grind him to dust-* There is an unmistakable allusion here to the stone destroying the image, the Kingdoms of men, in Dan. 2:44. The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and break our bones, to get up and stumble on with our natural self broken in every bone; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at his return, to share the judgments of this surrounding evil world- being "condemned with the world...". Yet strangely (at first sight) the figure of stumbling on the stone of Christ often describes the person who stumbles at his word, who rejects it (Is. 8:14,15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:7,8). In other words, through our spiritual failures we come to break ourselves, we become a community of broken men and women; broken in that we have broken our inner soul in conformity to God's will. As Simeon cuddled that beautiful, innocent baby Jesus, he foresaw all this: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again (resurrection) of many in Israel... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34). If we are to share his resurrection, if we are to experience such newness of life in this life, we must fall upon him, really feel the cutting edge of his word. We must be broken now; or be broken and ground to powder at the judgment. See on Mt. 3:11.

A passage in Ps. 118 is referred to in Lk. 20:18; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-8. One wonders if this was a proof text which the early believers would have known by heart. And one wonders likewise about Psalm 2- it is referred to so often.

20:19 *And the scribes and the chief priests sought to arrest him in that very hour, but they feared the people. For they perceived that he spoke this parable against them-* The connection with Isaiah 5 was so clear, and that song of the vineyard was a well known passage understood as the justification for the destruction of the first temple. The fear of the people was the reason why they didn't take the Lord. He realized this, and I suggested on chapter 19 that His mockery of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was calculated to turn the people violently against Him. He was the psychologist *extraordinaire*. By manipulating things in this way, the Lord held total control over His death and the timing and manner of it, so that His arrest and crucifixion were in fact His giving of His life, rather than it being taken away from Him.

20:20 *And they watched him and sent out spies, who pretended to be sincere-* Rightly had the Lord called them hypocrites. Their attempt at acting as sincere enquirers would have been laughable. All the way through, the Lord is presented as the one totally in control, with the Jews and Romans acting exactly as He had set them up to act.

*So that they might catch him in something he said; so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the Roman governor-* The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9). As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny. We note they could *not* in fact catch hold of His words (:26). His death was not going to be because they outsmarted Him, but rather because He willingly set up a situation through which He willingly gave His life rather than it being taken from Him.

20:21 *And they asked him, saying: Teacher, we know you say and teach rightly-* Gk. *orthos*, from whence 'orthodox'. They were thereby trying to lead Him to make a right wing, conservative answer, namely, that tribute should be given to God and not Caesar. And then the Herodians with whom they were working in this plan (see Matthew) could legally swoop upon Him and have Him arrested for disloyalty to the empire.

*And show no favouritism to any person-* This was an appeal to Jewish orthodoxy, whereby the righteous Jew was supposed to be obedient to God regardless of what others thought. They were trying to lead the Lord into a position whereby He said 'No' to the question about giving the tribute money. And the Herodians were ready to pounce on Him if He did; for according to Matthew, they were working together with the Pharisees in this. We can reconstruct how the Pharisees and Herodians worked together in this; the Pharisees were trying to lead the Lord by a path of theology and logic to a position whereby He denied the need to pay tribute- and then Herod's supporters could pounce on Him. The verisimilitude and internal agreement of the record is again strong encouragement to accept this as the inspired word of God, recording his actual words spoken rather than giving a mere summary or imagination of them from a distance of time and space.

*But in truth teach the way of God-* John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way or path over which God's glory in Messiah could come to Zion. The only other occurrence of "the way of God" is when we read that Apollos, who knew only John's teaching, had to have "the way of God", i.e. John's message about the way, explained more fully to him (Acts 18:26). It may be that John had been so unworldly that he had not paid tribute to Caesar, or at least, he had been interpreted that way; and so now the Pharisees were commenting that if the Lord truly upheld John's teaching, then what was his answer about paying the tribute money?

Because it was perceived, at very least, that John had advocated not paying it.

20:22 *Is it lawful*- This was purposefully vague, because they didn't clarify whether they meant the law of Moses or that of Rome. This was part of the trap. If the Lord said it was lawful according to Roman law, then they could accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses. If He said it was lawful according to the Law of Moses, and therefore that law must surely be obeyed, then He was breaking the law of Rome. But the Lord majestically rises above the trap, by (as usual) taking the whole issue to a far higher level.

*For us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?*- The word translated "tribute" was used by the Jews for the poll tax of Ex. 30:12-16; the argument was that this should be paid to the temple and not to Gentiles. By pushing the Lord for a yes / no answer, they thought they would force Him into an untenable position. Judas of Galilee had agitated about not paying the tribute money to the Romans (Acts 5:37) and had been executed for this in around AD6, in recent memory. The Lord as always appealed to higher principle- if it has Caesar's image, then give it to him; but what has God's image, your own body, then give it to God. The giving of our entire person to God made paying an annual tax to the temple seem cheap and irrelevant.

20:23 *But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them*- Mt. 22:18 says He perceived their wickedness. The wickedness could be their hypocrisy. But their "wickedness" could refer to their personal sins, and because in that moment the Lord perceived those sins, He thereby perceived their hypocrisy and therefore challenged them about their hypocrisy. He may have been given that perception of their sins by some flash of Divine insight, or it could be that His supreme sensitivity to people led Him to imagine correctly the kind of stuff going on in their secret lives.

20:24 *Show me a denarius*- The Pharisees claimed that pagan coinage should not be brought into the temple courts. This is why the coin had to be brought to the Lord, according to Matthew. By so doing, the Lord was purposefully provoking the Pharisees; likely the Herodians (Mt. 22:16) brought it, not the Pharisees.

The tribute money had the inscription *Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus Pontifex Maximus*- "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, High Priest". Pedants would've quickly assumed that such blasphemous language and appropriation of titles appropriate to the Lord Jesus would mean that such coinage should not be used, nor should such tribute be paid to any man on this basis. But the Lord saw a bigger picture. He was quite OK with such token behaviours, but the far bigger issue was giving to God our own bodies and lives which bear His image.

The coin bore an image which strict Jews considered blasphemous, denoting Tiberius as son of God, the divine Augustus. The Lord doesn't react to this as they expected – He makes no comment upon the blasphemy. He lets it go, but insists upon a higher principle. 'If this is what Caesar demands, well give it to him; but give what has the image of God, i.e. yourself, to God'. He didn't say 'Don't touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim'. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this]. The Lord wasn't like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body, fashioned in God's image – and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God's people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

*Whose image and superscription has it? And they said: Caesar's-* He was setting them up for His point that whatever bears God's image and superscription is to be given to Him (:25); and that refers to our body and whole lives. We have His signature on us; perhaps the Lord had in mind by this the idea that Israel were God's covenant people, His servants bearing His marks.

*20:25 And he said to them: Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's-* The Jews were looking for immediate deliverance from Caesar. The Lord's parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was designed to show that He was not bringing that kind of a Kingdom, that sort of salvation. By saying that tribute must indeed be rendered to Caesar, He was further dashing their Messianic hopes concerning Him, and further demonstrating that He was not the Messiah they were looking for. Thus He was consciously bringing about a situation whereby His popularity was turned into hatred, because of the whole psychology of dashed expectations making love turn to hate. The accusation that "We found this fellow... forbidding to give tribute to Caesar" (Lk. 23:2) was so utterly untrue.

The memories of the Maccabean heroes and their rebellion were strongly in the minds and consciousness of first century Israel. Their exploits were recited yearly at the feast of Hanukkah. Yet the Lord purposefully subverts the history of the Maccabees. Mattathias had taught violent resistance to Gentile occupation in the slogan: "Repay the Gentiles in their own coin" (1 Macc. 2:68 N.E.B.). But the Lord alludes to this, at

least to the LXX form of the saying, when He advocated paying the Roman temple tax, giving the coin to them, and not violently resisting. See on Heb. 5:6.

*And to God the things that are God's-* The Lord taught that whatever bears God's image must be 'rendered' to God, just as what bore Caesar's image must be rendered to Caesar (Lk. 20:25). Seeing that the human body bears God's image, He was clearly teaching that we should 'render' to God our whole being in the course of our human lives. But the same idea of rendering to God is picked up in 1 Pet. 4:5, where we are told that in the final judgment, we will 'render' [s.w.] ourselves to God. By the way we live now, the manner in which we render to God all that is not Caesar's, we are effectively rendering to Him our judgment account. And so we also find this Greek word for 'to render' in Rev. 22:12; Mt. 16:27; 20:8; 2 Tim. 4:8 and Rom. 2:6- at the day of judgment, where we render ourselves to God, He will "give" [s.w. 'render'] to every man according as his works have been. We're rendering ourselves to God right now, here in this life. And He will render that back to us in the last day- for we are right now giving our account to God. And there are times in life where perhaps God specifically intervenes in order to give us a taste of that final day of 'rendering' of ourselves to God- hence in the parable of Lk. 16:2, the man is asked to 'render an account' of his stewardship [s.w.]. It may be through illness, tragedy, loss, the intense introspection of depression, conviction of sin... in these things we are led to a specific preview of the 'rendering an account' which lies ahead. And we should be grateful that we have such opportunities.

What bears God's image, which is our whole body and mind (Gen. 1:26), is to be given to God. We have God's superscription written upon us, moreso if we are in Christ (Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

The things which are God's are to be 'rendered' to Him. The Greek word means to pay back, to return; even giving our very bodies only giving back what He has given us. The same word had been used recently by the Lord in teaching that we have a huge debt to God which must be 'rendered' or paid back to Him (Mt. 18:25,26,28). We can read the Lord's words here as meaning that concerns about pedantic issues relating to coinage are irrelevant compared to the paramount issue- that we owe God everything. Because we are created in God's image, the structure of our very bodies is an imperative to give ourselves totally to His cause (Mt. 22:19-21). Whatever bears God's image- i.e. our very bodies- must be given to Him. "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100:3 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is

not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

"Should we give tribute to Caesar?" was answered with the comment that whatever has God's image on it should be given to God- and seeing we're made in God's image, the Lord was asking that they gave their very personal selves to God, every part of their mind and body- rather than worrying about the 'guilt by association' that might come from paying your taxes to Caesar (Lk. 20:23-25).

*20:26 And they were not able to catch him in what he said in the presence of the people, so they marvelled at his answer and held their peace-* The Greek for "catch him" is elsewhere used about the Jews finally taking hold of the Lord in arrest and crucifixion. The Jews are also recorded as not being able to do this physically to Him in public, "before the people". But Luke speaks of the Jews doing these things in relation to "His words". This is Luke's way of saying what John says in so many words- that the Lord Jesus was so identified with His words, which were God's words, that He was "the word made flesh", the living personification of His own words, in whom there was perfect congruence between His essential self and His words.

They perceived what He was saying- for they "marvelled". Just as in the parable, the Jews heard the invitation to the banquet, and perceived that "this is the heir". But Matthew records that they went their way- and that way was the way to crucifying the Lord, killing the messenger of God.

*20:27 And there came to him-* Over 100 times we read in the Gospels of various people coming to Jesus- His enemies, the crowds, His disciples, people in need. Each came with their various motivations, agendas and pre-understandings of Him. His invitation to 'come to Him' was to come *in faith*. The repeated repetition of the phrase 'came to Him' is perhaps to invite us to see ourselves likewise as amongst those who 'come to Him' as we read or hear the Gospel record, ensuring that we are truly coming to Him and not merely on a surface level as so many did.

*Certain of the Sadducees, they that say that there is no resurrection-* The obvious response to a question from such people about the resurrection would be 'But you don't believe in a resurrection!'. They *antilego*, spoke against publicly, the resurrection. Mark's record adds that they also said that "In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise..." (Mk. 12:23). But the Lord was not so primitive as to point out their obvious untruth. He took their position as they stated it, and worked to demonstrate that even given that position, they were woefully ignorant of Divine truth. Long term, His approach stood a chance of working. If He had simply denounced them as liars and self-contradictory, there was no chance He would've ever contributed towards their possible repentance and change of heart. This approach needs to be take to heart by us. For there are

large numbers of believers who seem to think that their service to God involves cruising internet forums or endlessly arguing with their neighbours in order to prove them wrong and self-contradictory about doctrinal matters. This may give a slight ego rush for a moment, but it is not in fact any real victory. For the victory we seek is not to tie another up in mental knots, but to lead them to repentance, to the Lord Jesus, and to His Kingdom. We also need to note that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord could've called many witnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus, but instead He takes their argument and works from it.

It has been observed that the Sadducees were generally hedonistic- and this surely was a result of their denial of the future resurrection and judgment. Their belief was that only the Torah was inspired, and it was Israel's duty to live according to it in this life. They were a parade example of the effect of doctrine in practice.

20:28 *And they asked him, saying: Teacher, Moses wrote to us-* Matthew: "Moses *spoke* unto us". The Lord picks this up in His answer in Mt. 22:31: "Have you not read that which was *spoken* unto you by *God*". He is telling them that God and not Moses was the ultimate speaker to them; and that the word was not merely *written* but is a living word, actively *speaking* unto them. For all their much vaunted belief in Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, these men had failed to perceive that God was speaking to them personally through the human authors. And that criticism needs to be remembered today by those equally wedded to a declared belief in Divine inspiration of the Bible. It is to be to us a word *spoken* and not a dead letter written on paper.

*That if a man's brother dies, having a wife but he is childless, his brother should take the wife and raise up seed to his brother-* The Lord could have replied that if they read the entire passage in Dt. 25:5-7, they would see that God actually made a concession in this matter; and the whole principle only applied to "brethren dwelling together". A man did not *have* to marry his brother's wife. In any case, as most adult men were married, it would have usually been a case of polygamy. But again, the Lord didn't point out that expositional error, but goes on to develop a far greater and higher principle concerning the nature of His Kingdom, in which such casuistry about marriage will be simply irrelevant. And again, He sets an example to those who have spent their religious lives arguing about divorce and remarriage and fellowship issues. Their arguments could be demonstrated to be expositionally faulty. But the higher principle is that such issues shall be irrelevant in God's Kingdom; and we are to live the essence of the Kingdom life now as far as we can, in spirit at least. The Sadducees made a big deal of the fact that the word translated "raise up

seed" is that used generally in the Septuagint for resurrection. Their idea was that resurrection is not of the body but through family life. To die childless was therefore tragic indeed. The same error is made by many today who effectively believe that family life is the ultimate form of spirituality. It is not, and God seeks to build a personal relationship with each of us, He is the personal God of Abraham, Isaac etc., and we shall experience a personal bodily resurrection at which we shall appear before God stripped of our family, and relate to Him as a single individual.

20:29 *There were therefore seven brothers; and the first took a wife and died childless-* This must have been a most unfortunate family. The Old Testament speaks of the failure to build up a house / family and the death of men in youth as being a curse from God for disobedience (Job 18:19; Ps. 107:38,39). Again, the Lord could have made capital of this- but He didn't. There was no element of personal attack, but rather an appeal to higher principle.

20:30 *And the second-* As noted on :29, this was clearly not a true story.

20:31 *And the third took her, and likewise the seventh also left no children, and died-* Instead of asking 'And who and where was this family?', picking up the obvious contradictions within the story, the Lord let all that go. He wanted to focus upon essential principles, rather than getting caught up in proving that His opponents were lying. He sets an example which so many of His followers have not well followed.

20:32 *Afterward the woman also died-* She would have been judged to be a most unfortunate woman, likely under God's judgment (see on :29). But the Lord doesn't question the very unlikely story nor the contradictions within it- instead He works from what was presented to Him.

20:33 *In the resurrection, whose wife of these shall she be? For the seven had her as wife-* The Lord could've pointed out that they were well known for denying / speaking against the resurrection. But He doesn't make that obvious point, instead focusing on the higher principles rather than point scoring.

'Who will be married to whom in the Kingdom?' was well answered by the Lord, but His final cut was that God is the God of the living and "all live unto Him", i.e. the fact we are alive means we are responsible for our actions to Him right now- and we must be moved by that, rather than by speculation about the physicalities of how *others* may be in God's Kingdom (Lk. 20:33-38).

20:34 *And Jesus said to them: The children of this world marry and are given in marriage-* The Lord attacks their assumption that the Kingdom

will be a continuation of life as it is in this world, just minus some of the limitations and complications. That is not the case; "this world" is contrasted radically to "that world" (:35). Whilst we rightly look forward to seeing beloved family members again who were believers, we have to be aware that family relationships as we now know them are for "this world". The age to come will not be "this world" and its relationships somehow revived in a human sense. The question of the Jews was therefore a reflection of deep immaturity. And this was the context at the time- the Lord was being asked to set up a literal Kingdom in Israel, with Israel 'marrying and giving in marriage' in their own kingdom, totally independent of Rome. But His message was far beyond that. His Kingdom was to come in an age where all such things would be no more. The world of Lot and Noah's time married and gave in marriage right up until the day of judgment- and no longer, after that.

*20:35 But they that are accounted worthy to attain to that world and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage-* See on :34. "Accounted worthy" means to be counted totally without blame and thereby totally worthy. I suggest this is another example of where Luke is preparing his readers for the Pauline explanations in Romans- that only through imputed righteousness, by faith through grace, can anyone be saved. The same word is used when Paul prays that God would count the Thessalonians "worthy" of their calling (2 Thess. 1:11). The Jews were assuming that they would be in the age to come, on account of their relation to Abraham by the flesh; and the Lord is saying that the only ones who shall be there are those counted totally worthy. The thoughtful hearer would have realized that this would mean that worthiness and righteousness had to somehow be imputed.

*20:36 Neither can they die any more; for they are equal to the angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection-* Note the present tenses. They are most striking in Greek: "Neither *can they die...* they *are* equal to the Angels: and *are* sons of God, being sons of the resurrection". Greek tenses, unlike Hebrew tenses, are precise. We would expect 'They shall not die... shall be equal... shall be...'. But the present tenses are striking. The Lord is building up to His point that the question about marriage is inappropriate because God is outside of our kind of time; He sees the believers in Him as even now immortal, a point made more strongly in John's Gospel. This is not the same as having an immortal soul, nor does it imply conscious survival of death. Rather is it a reflection of how God from His perspective outside of time sees His children. Jn. 3:3-5 makes the same point, that we are born again of water and spirit even in this life, and thereby are living the life eternal. But that is from God's standpoint outside of time as we experience it.

The Sadducees denied the existence of Angels (Acts 23:8). The Lord's teaching that Angels do not marry was surely additionally an attack on

the Jewish myths becoming popular at the time concerning the supposed marriage of Heavenly Angels with the daughters of men in Gen. 6. These myths are deconstructed in Jude and 2 Peter, but the Lord here is also correcting them. We marvel at how apparently 'off the cuff' He could speak in such a multi-faceted and profound way, addressing various issues simultaneously. Although His intellectual and spiritual ability was doubtless capable of such instant responses, I prefer to imagine the Lord reflecting deeply upon God's word and preparing His ideas throughout the years of spiritual mindedness that preceded His ministry.

"We shall be as "the sons / children of God", thereby answering the Sadducees' idea that it is a human duty to have children and thereby continue the race, for therein do we have our 'resurrection'. Again the Lord is lifting the whole question to a far higher level. Luke adds that the Lord first said that "the children of this world marry...". The Sadducees were assuming that the Kingdom of God would be a kind of continuation of this present life, just with eternity of nature. Whilst there are similarities and aspects of continuity between who we are and who we shall eternally be, we are mistaken in imagining the future Kingdom of God as some kind of ideal earthly situation, a tropical paradise holiday, which shall last eternally. This is the same mistake as thinking that we shall eternally be doing what "the children of *this* world" currently do. Instead of criticizing and exposing the faults in the argument presented, the Lord makes the point that the Kingdom of God will not be about marriage nor about casuistic arguments about the definition of marriage- the very arguments which have occupied the minds of far too many of His children. Paul uses the same logic in reasoning that arguments about food are irrelevant because the Kingdom of God will not be about such behaviour, but about love, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). Paul, like the Lord here, could have exposed the fallacies of exposition being engaged with, but instead reasons on a higher level- that seeing we shall not be arguing about such things eternally, let us not do it now.

The fact Angels cannot die means they can't sin, for sin brings death (Rom. 6:23). This is therefore a fairly strong argument against immortal Angels being sinful.

20:37 *But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, when he called the Lord: The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob-* The Greek here says that Moses "calls" [present tense] God "the God of Abraham...". Not only does this imply a living word which speaks to us today, but again the point is made throughout the passage that God is outside of time. This choice of tenses in this passage is purposeful, for elsewhere we read of how Moses said or commanded things in the past tense (e.g. Mt. 8:4 "things which Moses commanded", "Moses wrote", Lk. 20:28; "Moses gave you...", Jn. 6:32).

If the Lord was looking merely for a reference to God being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He had many places He could have quoted from. I suggest He chose Ex. 3:6 partly to show that the supremely intimate, personal revelation of God to Moses was just the same now to all individuals within Israel. It was a living word spoken to them personally. But also because the Lord wants to make the point that God is outside of time- and that passage goes on to climax in the revelation of that same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14). The God outside of time, witnessed by the way the tetragrammaton somehow straddles past, present and future tenses, therefore sees the dead as alive "unto Him". The question put to the Lord was very much rooted in the assumption that time as we now know it is going to continue in the Kingdom of God, and the Lord is making the point that this is an immature way of looking at it; and therefore the question was irrelevant. The Exodus 3 passage also contains repeated assurance that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will receive what God has promised- which requires bodily resurrection for them. We need to ever remember that the Lord was not merely demonstrating intellectual prowess in all this reasoning and allusion. He considered them as the sheep who erred / were astray, and through all His teaching here He was merely seeking to steer them to Him and ultimate salvation.

At the time of the burning bush, Moses seems to have forgotten God's covenant name, he didn't immediately take off his shoes in respect as he should have done, he feared to come close to God due to a bad conscience, and he resisted God's invitation for him to go forth and do His work (Ex. 3:5-7,10,11,18; 4:1,10-14). And yet at this very time, the Lord says that Moses showed faith in the way he perceived God. This is indeed imputed righteousness.

God is His word (Jn. 1:2). Moses is likewise spoken of as if he is his word (Acts 15:21; 21:21; 26:22; 2 Cor. 3:18), so close was his association with it; just as we shall be judged by our words. The words and commands of Moses were those of God. "In the bush God spoke unto (Moses), saying, I am the God of Abraham... Isaac and Jacob" (Mk. 12:26; Mt. 22:31; Ex. 3:6). Yet Lk. 20:37 says that "that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when *he calls the Lord the God of Abraham*" etc. Yet this was what God said of Himself.

20:38 *Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. For all live to Him-* This Greek construction could mean 'Not only the God of the dead, but also of the living'. But the context is the Lord demonstrating that the understanding of the Sadducees was very much a dead religion and their God was effectively dead. They denied the resurrection and considered that we have reward only in this life. In this case, God was the God of Abraham only in the past. The Greek phrase could literally mean 'Not the

God the dead, but the living [God]', alluding to the well known phrase "the living God". If God only acted for Abraham etc. in the past, then the God Abraham knew effectively died when Abraham died. But the living God seeks to impart life to the faithful.

"All live to Him" is the Lord is critiquing their division between this life and the life to come- by saying that the faithful live on now in God's memory as they will eternally; He speaks of things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17), and in this sense whether we live or die we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8). Although the soul is mortal, the spirit returns to God and will be eternally "saved" at the last day. And the spirit refers to who a man essentially is, his thinking and character. This is preserved by God in His memory, and in that sense the faithful dead "live" before Him now. John's Gospel puts this in so many words by saying that we can live the eternal life right now. Whilst bodily resurrection is so significant from our point of view, the God who is outside of our kind of time sees the dead as effectively living as He extends forwards into eternity from the present- in a way we cannot now do. I made the point above that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord at that time had emphasized that the resurrection of Lazarus was a visual reminder of the new life which those who believed in Him could experience right now: "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn. 11:26). Luke's comment that "all live unto Him" is saying roughly the same thing. If our spirit is focused upon living and thinking the Kingdom life now, then this spirit is preserved by God upon death. And it is this which God sees after our death, and the sense in which we live unto Him. See on Rom. 14:8,9.

"All live to him" is a phrase used by the Rabbis concerning the existence of the faithful Jews as immortal souls in Heaven; Adam Clarke quotes several examples from Jewish writings. It seems the Lord uses their phrase in order to deconstruct it. Salvation is through being 'counted worthy' by grace (:35), the same idea as being counted as live "to Him", and depends upon the resurrection of the body (:35). It is not at all automatic, as would be required by the idea of immortal souls.

20:39 *And certain of the scribes answering said: Teacher, you have said well-* This was the kind of admission of defeat which was not typical of the Lord's enemies; perhaps these were the scribes of the Pharisees who did later believe in the Lord Jesus (Acts 15:15).

20:40 *And after that they dared not question him anymore-* They dared not even try to engage Him in debate because He was as it were winning, and the crowds were realizing this. These very words are used of how the disciples after the resurrection dared not ask who Jesus was (Jn. 21:12), which is the very context here. The connection is clearly to show that they

too through their being too influenced by Jewish thinking found themselves in the same category as the unbelieving Jews- the difference being that they repented of it. The Greek for "questions" isn't in the original; they dared not ask Him again. The implication from the context could be that they dared not ask Him 'Who are You?', for the answer was clear in their consciences. They knew, on one level, that He was Messiah, that He was the heir to the vineyard, whom they knowingly sought to murder.

20:41 *And he said to them: Why do they say that the Christ is David's son?*- The Lord had clearly done well in answering the questions, and it's easy to misinterpret this as Him now going onto the thrust of an offensive, having successfully parried the attacks. But He was trying to steer them to Him, to repentance and salvation, and not to merely win an intellectual battle for its own sake. All the same, He capitalized upon their continued presence to seek to correct another major misunderstanding. His desire to save them is breathtaking. The fact there were Pharisees who later converted to Christ is proof enough that His strategy worked, at least for some (Acts 15:5). And remember that Saul the Pharisee was living in Jerusalem at the time, and may well have been listening carefully.

They were surely aware that Jesus was a son of David, on both the sides of Mary and Joseph. For the Jewish leaders would've done their homework as to His [apparent] family of origin.

Matthew records that the Lord addressed a question to the Pharisees about Messiah as David's son. Having let the Pharisees give the answer, He then asks others how this can be the case. Again, the Lord's dialogues with the Pharisees was not simply to try to convert them, but in order that the audience would learn. See on Mt. 22:33 *When the multitude heard this*. Mk. 12:37 concludes the section by observing that "the common people heard Him gladly", so again we see how the records seamlessly complement each other.

20:42 *For David himself said in the book of Psalms: The Lord said-* Clearly Yahweh. If the Divine Name was to be used in the New Testament, surely this would be the place for it. The fact it is not, when some Hebrew words are used (e.g. 'Sabaoth'), shows clearly enough that the literal usage of the Tetragrammaton is not something God sees as important or even required.

*To my Lord, Sit on My right hand-* Biblically and historically, David's immediate 'Lord' was Saul. Ps. 110 was originally a revelation to David of the potential possible for Saul, who was an anointed 'Messiah' figure. But Saul failed, and so the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus. The "how" doesn't imply that David's Lord is not his son, but rather is a rhetorical question. How is the Messianic son

of David, David's "Lord", to be his son or descendant? Mk. 12:37 says the Lord reinforced the question by asking "*From whence* is He his son?". The answer had to be: 'Through a woman in David's direct line giving birth to Him'. And the questioners were fully aware that Jesus was in the direct line of David through Mary.

20:43 *Until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet*- The Lord's enemies stood around Him as He applied this Psalm to Himself. And yet being at the footstool of the Lord doesn't have to mean being dominated by Him in judgment. It can refer to the great paradox whereby the Lord's enemies become His loyalest and most humble citizens, at His feet in submission, and thereby also at the Father's right hand of acceptance.

20:44 *David therefore calls him Lord, so, how is he his son?*- Judaism's concept of Messiah has always been vague and not commonly agreed, but there was and is the idea that the likes of Abraham, Moses and David are greater than Messiah. The Lord is pointing out that David considered Messiah to be his "Lord", just as Messiah was greater than Abraham (Jn. 8:58).

20:45 *And in the hearing of all the people, he said to his disciples*- This is typical of how the Lord intentionally focused upon the disciples. The accounts of the sermons on the mount and on the plain have the same feature; the crowds are gathered, but the Lord addresses the disciples. He realized they were His only hope; the masses were fickle, and He focused upon those who were open to His real teaching.

20:46 *Beware of the scribes, who desire to walk in long robes and love greetings in the marketplaces*- The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (Mt. 20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the Gospel (Mt. 11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

*And chief seats in the synagogues, and chief places at feasts*- They wanted to be publicly seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity. Note that the Lord here is repeating almost word for word what He has previously said about the Pharisees in Luke 11. To repeat so much text twice in the Gospel records, and for the Lord to give identical word-for-word teaching on two occasions, shows how important these warnings are for all readers. This consideration alone suggests that

we each have the same tendency as the Pharisees; they are but epitomes of our own deepest tendencies and desires.

*20:47 Who devour widows' houses-* The language used here about the behaviour of the Scribes and Pharisees is elsewhere used about the righteous behaviour of the Lord and His followers; the Jewish leaders were living a religious life, but it was but a parody of true spirituality. The same words for "devour" and "house" are used of how the Lord Jesus was 'eaten up' or 'devoured' with zeal for His Father's "house". But by contrast the Scribes thought only of how they could devour the houses of widows, scheming how to get the house of a vulnerable single old woman left to them, and how they could devour that wealth upon themselves. We note that Mark and Luke conclude this section with the account of the widow who gave her entire wealth to the temple coffers (Mk. 12:42; Lk. 21:1). This was surely to add assurance that although her donation was misused, it was carefully noted by God to her eternal credit.

*And for a pretence make long prayers-* They were hypocrites. The word was used about an actor's cloak, and thus connects with the theatrical term 'hypocrites', play-actors. The Lord uses the same word in Jn. 15:22: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no *cloak* for their sin". When did He come and speak unto the Jews about their hypocrisy? Surely here in Mark 12. Although they did have a cloak for their sin before men, the Lord is saying in John 15 that they have no such cloak before Him.

*These shall receive greater condemnation-* There will be degrees of punishment, although it will be self-inflicted.

21:1 *And he looked up and saw the rich men that were casting their gifts into the treasury-* He "looked up" because Mark notes He was sitting. As he looked up and saw Zacchaeus, so the same term is used here of how He looked upon this poor widow; who was clearly another one of His people known to Him ahead of time. The many small coins the rich threw in make a loud clanging noise in the collection trumpets. They were literally trumpeting their good deeds before men in God's house. The widow threw in the same kind of coins which they threw in in abundance. What she threw in was scarcely audible to men; but the Lord noticed. The only other references to the Lord sitting are to Him sitting in judgment. And that judgment was ongoing even then; it does and will finally take into account the things not audible to men.

21:2 *And he saw a certain poor widow throwing in there two small coins-* She could have kept one of the coins; but she threw both of them in. The thin coins (Mk.) were what were typically thrown to beggars; we are left to conclude that she gave to God all that was given to her.

21:3 *And he said: Of a truth I say to you: This poor widow threw in more than all of them-* The Lord condemned how the Pharisees "devoured widow's houses"- and then straight away we read of Him commending the widow who threw in her whole living to the coffers of the Pharisees. It wasn't important that the widow saw through the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and didn't 'waste' her few pennies; her generosity was accepted for what it was, even though it didn't achieve what it might have done, indeed, it only abetted the work of evil men.

The Lord taught that one must forsake all that he has in order to truly be His disciple (Mt. 13:44; Lk. 14:33). But at the end of His ministry, He as it were chose to exemplify this aspect of discipleship by drawing attention to a woman who gave to God "all the living that she had" (Lk. 21:3). Putting the passages together, the Lord is saying that she is to be the model for us all in this aspect of devotion.

So clearly, God accounts not as man does. We are judged according to our possibilities and not according to volume of achievement. She threw in "more", literally she 'exceeded', that the others had thrown in. The same word is used of how our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). She is again presented as the model disciple. The word has just been used in Mk. 12:33 of how love of God and neighbour is "more" than all sacrifices. She achieved that love not by volume of achievement but in her attitude.

21:4 *For all these out of their abundance have put in offerings, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on-* The Lord pointed out to the disciples how the extreme generosity of the widow, giving the two pennies of her business capital, her "living", to the Lord, was worth far more than the ostentatious giving of the wealthy Jewish leadership (Mk.

12:44); but the next incident recorded by Mark is the disciples marvelling at the ostentatious buildings of the temple, and the Lord explaining that all this needed to be thrown down (Mk. 13:1,2). Their slowness to perceive is such a theme of the gospel records. To give from that which is over and above and remaining, "abundance", is not giving much at all really. "Out of her poverty" could suggest that it was her poverty which motivated her gift, as if to say that her greater generosity was not surprising, because she was poor; and in her case, total giving was motivated by her poverty. So it is poverty and not wealth which, as the Lord observed, motivates to the kind of radical giving which He seeks.

*21:5 And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and offerings, he said-* These words are taken over in the later New Testament to describe the adorning of a new temple with precious stones, comprised of the believers in Christ (Rev. 21:2,19). Their praise of the ostentatious "offerings" reflects how they had apparently failed to grasp the lesson about the real nature of offerings just given by the incident with the widow woman (:1-4).

The temple buildings were thrown down *in order that* a new and spiritual building comprised of believers could be built up through the Lord's work in the hearts of His people. The group of believers are "All the building [which] grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Paul, writing before AD70, may have had this contrast indirectly in mind when he wrote that when the earthly house is destroyed, we should remember that we have a "house not made with hands" built by God (2 Cor. 5:1). The same struggle and angst at the loss of physical structures of our religion can be seen today; some find it hard to believe that relationship with God is ultimately personal, and that relationship continues even when surrounding, much loved traditional structures are removed.

*21:6 As for these things which you behold, the days will come, in which there shall not be left here one stone upon another; all shall be thrown down-* This expands upon His previous use of this word in Mt. 23:38: "Your house is *left* unto you desolate". He is asking the disciples to see with the eye of faith- that effectively, the great stones of the temple were already thrown down, the temple was already "desolate" (Gk. 'a deserted place'). The judgment of the leprous house was to be thrown down, stone by stone (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. They are not therefore asking about different chronological events when

they ask when this shall be, and what sign would indicate the end of the age. This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law. Hence the same word translated "thrown down" is ascribed to Stephen when he was accused of preaching that the Lord Jesus would "*destroy* this place and [therefore] change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14). Paul uses the same word about his 'destruction' of the things of legalistic dependence on the law for salvation, by preaching salvation by grace in Jesus (Gal. 2:18). It is also the word used in 2 Cor. 5:1, a passage which seems to have some reference to the impending destruction of the temple and its replacement with the spiritual house of God's building: "Our earthly house of this tabernacle be *destroyed* [s.w. "thrown down"], we have a building of God, an house not made with hands...". All this would suggest that there was a changeover period envisaged between the Lord's death and the final ending of the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law. Seeing the end Lord ended the Law on the cross, this again is to be seen as a concession to the conservatism of the Jews.

*21:7 And they asked him, saying: Teacher, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign when these things are about to happen?*- They clearly expected one particular sign, and *semeion* is typically used of a miraculous wonder. Instead, the Lord gave them a series of signs which they were to discern. The fulfilment of these signs in our times is no less than a miracle- that such detailed predictions could start to come true before our eyes. Such fulfilment of prophecy is therefore itself a miracle. The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4).

Martin Hengel concludes that the early Gospel records were so radical that they would've been part of an "underground literature". He suggests that the Roman law forbidding oral or written prophecies about the fall of the Roman empire- on pain of death- was enough to make the Olivet prophecy alone a highly illegal document.

If none of us can know the time of the Lord's return, the whole spirit of the Olivet Prophecy is hard to come to terms with. When the disciples asked "When shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Lk. 21:7), the Lord didn't cut short the conversation by saying 'Well actually you can't know, so your question isn't appropriate'. He gave them just what they asked for: signs whereby the faithful would know "when these things shall come to pass". The primary application of all this was that the faithful knew exactly the approaching end of the Jewish age in AD70- everything went according to plan, for those who correctly understood the prophecies. Therefore James, Peter and Paul could assuredly teach that "the judge stands before the door" (James 5:9) etc. And it is apparent that the situation in the run

up to AD70 was typical of that in our last days. Likewise, the position of the faithful remnant in Babylon at the time of the restoration is another type of latter day events. And they too had an opening of their eyes to the prophetic word, resulting in an ability to clearly see where they were, and that the time of restoration of Israel's Kingdom was imminent.

'What will be the signs of the last days?' was indeed answered quite directly, but building up to a personal, incisive appeal to pray constantly that we will be preserved from those horrors and be accepted before the final judgment seat of God's Son (Lk. 21:7,36). It was as if the Lord was adding a powerful caveat- as if to say 'Now don't go and get obsessed and distracted trying to match these signs to current events- worry about how *you* will survive the last days, and whether, when you stand before Me in the very end, you will stand or fall before Me'. And 'Are you really the Messiah? Do you really fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies?' was met by an appeal to not stumble in faith (Lk. 7:21-23). See on Lk. 19:11.

21:8 *And he said: Take heed you are not led astray. For many shall come in my name, saying: I am he, and, The time is at hand-* Coming in the name of the Lord was the formula used in Judaism to describe Messiah (Mt. 21:9; 23:39). The false claims to be Jesus the Christ are hardly persuasive nor vaguely credible. That they should be a source of mass falling away amongst the Lord's people seems hardly likely. We must assume, therefore, that such persons will have a credibility or a surrounding context which makes them far more attractive than they currently are. Revelation speaks of false miracles being done in the last days. Perhaps views of prophetic fulfilment will become so dogmatically held, suggesting that Christ *must* come once certain things happen in the world, that the believers will be open to easy deception. This scenario would be the more likely if a doctrine of *parousia*, the "coming" of Christ", is adopted which postulates that His coming will be somehow secret, invisible to the world and perceived only by the faithful.

Josephus describes the period before AD70 as being when "The country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false Messiahs and impostors, who deluded the people with promises of great events" [*Antiquities* 20.10.13 5,6].

*Do not be led astray by them-* "Be not deceived" is extensively quoted later in the NT concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the ecclesia* (1 Cor. 6:9,15,33; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:13, as Mt. 24:4 = 1 Jn. 3:7). The deceivers the Lord spoke of were not just bogus Messiahs out in the world, but apparently Spirit-gifted brethren who will arise within the ecclesia.

Warnings against being deceived are a major theme in the Lord's message here (Mt. 24:5,11,24). Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the

ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The later NT writers make the same appeal using the same Greek words, with reference to not being deceived by the allurements of the fleshly life (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; James 1:16). And warnings against "them that deceive you" are common, along with lament that many believers in the first century had indeed been deceived (s.w. 2 Tim. 3:13; James 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; Rev. 2:20). Indeed, Revelation is full of warnings and judgment against "the devil" who deceives God's people (s.w. Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3). Perhaps this is one reason why the Olivet prophecy was not fulfilled in AD70- the warning with which the Lord opened the prophecy was not heeded by the majority.

*21:9 And when you shall hear of wars and revolutions, do not be terrified. For these things are necessary and must happen first, but the end will not be immediately-* The dramatic growth of the media and communication will mean that everyone 'hears' of such things. And our generation as none before is in this situation. We can likewise understand the related word (in the Greek): "*rumours of wars*". Lk. 21:9 adds to the other records "and commotions", disquiet, mental upset and confusion. Hence the appeal not to be "troubled" within our hearts. Lk. 21:26 speaks of human hearts failing them for fear in worry and expectation (AV "looking after") about the world's future. This sign, therefore, is not so much concerning the proliferation of war, but of human worry about the geopolitical situation. And our generation has been the only one capable of fulfilling this situation. Note, however, that *you* shall hear these things- and the "you" was initially the listening disciples. Clearly the prophecy was intended to have fulfilment in the lifetime of the disciples, but this didn't happen. Because the Divine program was rescheduled.

They were not to be terrified / disturbed. The word is only used outside the Olivet prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:2, where Paul warns that believers should not be "troubled" by any idea that "the day of Christ is at hand", because the prophecy concerning the great falling away and the man of sin sitting in the temple of God must be fulfilled first. This connection shows that the prophecy of 2 Thess. 2 must have a specific latter day fulfilment on the very eve of the Lord's visible return in glory when "the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). The "day of Christ" is therefore the visible return of the Lord, and this, therefore, is the burden of the Olivet prophecy too. For Paul is taking that language and applying it to the second coming of Christ. And that did not happen in AD70. In Lk. 21:11 the Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel. During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level of fear will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced

Esau- representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (perhaps an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon My people" (Ez. 21:12).

These things were necessary (Mt.), they must happen (Lk.), must take place (Mk.). Quoting Dan. 2:28 LXX, as if the prophecy of Daniel 2 could have had its fulfilment at the time of the destruction of the temple in AD70. Again we encounter the idea of potential fulfilments of prophecy which in fact didn't happen when they could have done. The AV inserts in italics "all these things", but the Lord has only given the sign of worry about wars at this stage in the discourse. He used the identical phrase in predicting that the "all things" of the Mosaic system were to be fulfilled in His death on the cross (5:18). The same term is used in Jn. 1:3: "All things were fulfilled [AV "made"] in Him"- surely a reference to the fulfilment of the Mosaic law in Christ. The "old things" of the Mosaic system passed away, and in Christ "all things are fulfilled [AV "made"] new" (2 Cor. 5:17- same Greek words). There was a changeover period permitted between the Mosaic system and that of Christ, which finished when the temple was destroyed in AD70 and obedience to the Mosaic law thereby became impossible. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we have the Lord hinting that the Mosaic system would be ended, the temple destroyed, but the end was still not to be then. This would again indicate that the events of AD70 were not the "end" which the Lord had in view. "The end" (s.w.) would only come when the Gospel was preached in the entire habitable world (Mt. 24:14) and the believers had been persecuted of all men (Mk. 13:13). But again, the Lord had in mind the possibility that the disciples themselves would endure "unto the end" (10:22; 24:13). It could have come in their lifetime; but it didn't. John's Gospel replaces the Olivet prophecy with the upper room discourse, in which the Lord spoke of His spiritual presence in the hearts of believers through the Comforter. And John's equivalent of "the end" in that discourse is the comment that the Lord Jesus loved His people "unto the end" through dying on the cross (Jn. 13:1 s.w.). This is not to downplay the reality of the second coming, but it is a foil against a mindset that thinks solely in terms of fulfilling prophecy and the literal coming of the Lord. True and wonderful as that is, the essence of the Lord's presence is in His abiding presence in the hearts of spiritually minded believers in Him, and the "end" is His death for us, which in one sense is enough for us all regardless of when He will literally return. But again, Paul, like his Lord, felt that "the end" could have come in the first century; for he writes of how the believers then were living at "the end [s.w.] of the age" (1 Cor. 10:11), when God's wrath against Israel was about to burst "unto the end (AV "to the uttermost"; 1 Thess. 2:16). Likewise Peter: "The end

[s.w.] of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7). Likewise Dan. 9:26 could then have had its fulfilment.

21:10 *Then said he to them: Nation shall rise against nation-* Any first century fulfilment is unlikely because the *Pax Romana* meant that the Roman empire was firmly in power and such a situation did not therefore occur. *Ethnos* is the word commonly translated "Gentiles". The picture of nations and kingdoms rising up against each other was simply not fulfilled in the run up to AD70- the Roman empire with their *Pax Romana* did not permit such a situation. And the system of world empires which disintegrated in the 20th Century likewise didn't permit much of this in recent times, especially in the area around Israel, or in the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of all Bible prophecy. Only in our times has this become a reality, especially in the Arab world and amongst the nations located in the territory promised to Abraham. The language of 'rising up' in revolt is now common amongst them. The picture, however, is of the Gospel going into all those "nations" at this time (Mt. 24:14), all those nations persecuting the believers (Mt. 24:9), and the nations [AV "Gentiles"] taking Jerusalem and treading it down (Lk. 21:24); despite their internal struggles, these same "all nations" will be confederated under a latter Babylon (Rev. 17:15; 18:3,23). The overall picture is of Gospel preaching going on at a time when the nations are rising up against each other, and at the same time persecuting the believers. This scenario is developing- but is as yet unfulfilled on a global scale. But it is daily fulfilling in the nations surrounding Israel, who are persecuting Christians, rising up against each other, and to whom the Gospel is being powerfully preached. Never before has my own mission organization received such major expression of serious interest from the Muslim nations surrounding Israel, thanks largely to the growth of the internet and the growing disillusion with the existing social and religious situation. People from all nations will be gathered before the Lord for judgment (Mt. 25:32) and people from every nation will be saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9)- confirming that the Gospel will indeed spread to all nations before the Lord's return; it must at least be "proclaimed" to them all, thereby making people amongst them responsible to judgment; the "fullness of the Gentiles" must "come in" to Christ before the end comes and Israel repent (Rom. 11:25). The Lord sent the disciples out to "all nations" (Mt. 28:19 s.w.); the implication is that they failed to take the Gospel to them all, and therefore the intended scenario didn't fulfil as initially intended in the first century. Lk. 21:25 speaks of how there will be "upon the earth [land- that promised to Abraham] distress of nations", suggesting that the situation amongst the Gentile nations living within the land promised to Abraham is the particular focus of the prophecy. The same language is used of how there were devout Jews in "every nation under Heaven" (Acts 2:5)- and the list of nations in Acts 2 corresponds with the Middle Eastern Moslem world of today. We note that the promise that Abraham should be father of "many nations" was fulfilled in a literal sense in that Abraham is

the ancestor of the Arab nations living in the land promised to him (Rom. 4:17). And it is those nations particularly who have stated their desire to take Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jews, as required in Lk. 21:24.

*And kingdom against kingdom-* It seems likely from Revelation that 'Babylon' of the last days will rise to political and military dominance in the territory promised to Abraham, the earth/ land of which the Bible speaks so much. The 10 nations / horns / leaders which exist in the land promised to Abraham- the "kings of the earth / land"- will give their power to Babylon, by force and by political manoeuvre, and this system will then invade Israel. The horns hating the whore implies there will be inter-Arab friction apparent in the beast system throughout its existence. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24:7) will be a sign of the last days. In the AD70 context, this referred to friction between the Semitic peoples living around Israel; and the Lord's words are clearly an allusion to 2 Chron. 15:6, which specifically uses the phrase about inter-Arab friction. The fragile alliance between them will then be broken by the Lord's return, the horns will hate the whore and destroy her. They give their power to the beast for but "one hour". Daniel seems to associate a covenant which is then broken with the latter day Antichrist. Is. 30:27-31 speaks of the latter day Assyrian as placing "a bridle in the jaw of the people causing them to err", referring to some kind of covenant / agreement which forces others to follow their direction. The Lord's especial fury will be against the individual latter day Nebuchadnezzar who leads the invasion. The future leader of Babylon, the whore riding the beast, will see themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah and Micah describe the latter day invader of the land as "the Assyrian" (Is. 10:5; 14:25; 30:31; Mic. 5:1-6). This itself suggests we are to see the individual who heads up the invasion, the rosh / chief prince of Ez. 38:2, as an ethnic Assyrian / Iraqi. Dan. 8:24,25 invites us to see the same- the "king of fierce countenance" stands up out of the area of northern Iraq / northern Iran.

21:11 *And there shall be great earthquakes-* Just as there was at the crucifixion (Mt. 27:54), yet another reason for thinking that the tribulation of the last days will enable Israel to identify with the sufferings of their crucified Messiah. Again, earthquakes feature in the seals of Rev. 6:12; and in the judgments upon Israel's enemies in Rev. 11:13,19; 16:18. Again, it seems that Israel will initially experience the judgments upon their enemies, just as they did in the lead up to their Passover deliverance in Egypt which also prefigures their final salvation. The fig tree nation- Israel- is to be shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:13), and the word "shaken" is a form of that translated "earthquake". The forcing of fruit from the fig tree will be brought about by the experience of the earthquake.

*And in various places-* The word "various" is added by the translators to try to make sense of the otherwise obvious statement that earthquakes will occur in "places". There is no suggestion in the Greek text that earthquakes will occur in various places worldwide where they have not been known to occur. But maybe we have here an intensive plural- the one great place. The same word is used in Mt. 24:15 about "the holy place". There are rumours that an earthquake hit the temple area around AD70. But seeing that the temple mount is the bone of contention between Israel and her neighbours, an earthquake splitting the mount would be appropriate. And of course this would link directly with the prediction of Zechariah 14, that when Christ returns there will be an earthquake which splits it. And yet this is used by the Lord as a sign of His coming, rather than a statement about what will happen at His return. It could be that this is an example of how the meaning of time will be somehow collapsed around the second coming; a sign of His return is in effect His return. Or it could be that the events described in the Olivet prophecy will all happen in a very short period of time, a matter of days rather than years or decades [as is assumed by those who seek to connect the predictions with current world events]. Mk. 13:8 and Lk. 21:11 speak of the earthquakes in *kata* places, but this doesn't necessarily mean 'various' places, but could equally mean 'around'- earthquakes around the holy place would then be signs and portents of the earthquake under the Holy Place which will happen when Christ returns. In Acts 6:13,14 Stephen's enemies appear to have twisted his quotations of the Lord's Olivet prophecy to mean that Christ would destroy the "holy place" [s.w. "places" here in Mt. 24].

*Famines and pestilences-* There was an acute famine in Israel during Elijah's ministry of three and a half years, as part of God's appeal for Israel to repent and respond to Elijah's message (Lk. 4:25). And so it will be in the final three and a half year tribulation. Likewise it was famine which led the prodigal to repent and return to the Father (Lk. 15:14,17), a clear prototype of Israel's repentance. And perhaps the greatest prototype of their repentance is in the coming of Joseph's brothers to bow before Him; and this too was provoked by famine throughout the region around Israel (Acts 7:11). There will be a purpose in all the sufferings which precede the Lord's return- and that purpose is to bring about Israel's repentance, which is the key condition required for His second coming. There were indeed major famines in the lead up to AD70 (Acts 11:28 "a great famine throughout all the world"); again, the signs which depended upon Divine intervention were fulfilled in the first century, but those which depended upon Israel and the believers did not, because they chose not to. And thus the second coming was delayed. "In the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD41-54) there were four seasons of great scarcity. In the fourth year of his reign, the famine in Judea was so severe that the price of food became enormous and great numbers perished. Earthquakes occurred in each of the reigns of Caligula and

Claudius" (R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000: Baker Books), p. 36). Paul encourages his first century readers that famine and other elements of the Olivet predictions would not separate believers from the love of God- as if he expected those signs to be fulfilled in their lifetimes (Rom. 8:35). The seals of Revelation 6 are full of reference to the Olivet predictions, as if they could all have been fulfilled in the first century (Rev. 6:8 speaks specifically of "famine"). Famine can come quicker than ever in our modern world, where most countries depend upon imported food; and this is especially the case in the area around Israel, where the climate doesn't enable the support of the relatively large population living in the area without food being imported. This explains how Babylon's famine comes in one day (Rev. 18:8). This could never have been possible in the ancient world, where famine required a period of time to develop. Just as Israel initially experienced the early plagues upon Egypt, so it may be that the judgments poured out upon the [Arab?] world at the very end do initially affect Israel too, and lead them to repentance.

*And there shall be terrors and great signs from heaven-* During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level of paranoia will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau - representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon my people" (Ezek. 21:12). Likewise our Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel (Luke 21:11).

21:12 *But more significantly than all these things, they shall lay their hands on you and shall persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake-* "The synagogues... the prisons" - implying both a religious and civil persecution of the saints? The Lord predicted that His people would be cast out of the synagogues, as if He was happy that Christianity remained a sect of Judaism until such time as Judaism wouldn't tolerate it. His prediction that His people would be beaten in synagogues (Mk. 13:9) implies they would still be members, for the synagogues only had power to discipline their own members, not the general public. The Lord had no fear of 'guilt by association' with wrong religious views such as there were within Judaism.

They were to be "delivered up" just as the Lord was 'betrayed' [s.w. 10:4; 20:18,19; 26:2,15,16,21,23,24,25,45,46,48; 27:3,4; 17:22 "the Son of Man shall be betrayed"] to the Jews and 'delivered up' to the Gentiles

[s.w. 27:18,26,2 "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate"] for suffering, death- and thereby to resurrection. Again, there is an attempt to make those enduring these things identify with Him in His time of suffering. They too would be delivered up to both Jews and Gentiles- to synagogues [Jews; 10:17; Lk. 21:12] and to prisons, rulers and kings [Gentiles; Lk. 21:12; Mk. 13:9]. Mark adds "They shall deliver you up to councils and in the synagogues you shall be beaten". Clearly the Lord had in mind a first century fulfilment of His words, but as we have seen, not all the signs fulfilled in the first century and the Lord's *parousia* did not literally happen when the temple was destroyed. We therefore have to look to a re-scheduled fulfilment of these words in the persecution of the disciples in the last days.

The "persecution" is in Matthew "to tribulation", the "great *tribulation*" (Mt. 24:21,29). The Lord was addressing the disciples, and yet their sufferings were not completely in line with the picture presented here, whereby their suffering was at the same time as Jerusalem was surrounded by armies. Clearly the intended program was delayed. John's equivalent of the Olivet prophecy is the upper room discourse, and the same idea of a woman in the sorrows of labour is to be found there, and also this same word for 'afflicted' is found, translated "anguish" and "tribulation": "A woman when she is in labour has... *anguish*... in the world you shall have *tribulation*" (Jn. 16:21,33). The Lord seems to speak as if these experiences will be those of all His true followers, but just as His anguish and sorrow came to term in His triumphant resurrection, so for all who are in Him. John uses the language of the Olivet prophecy but seems to apply it in more general terms to the suffering of the believer in all ages. Surely this was consciously done as a response to the fact that the Olivet prophecy had been rescheduled in fulfilment. Again we find the idea of 'affliction' associated with the Lord's sufferings. Joseph, His clearest prototype, was 'afflicted' (Acts 7:10 s.w.), just as his brothers were 'afflicted' to lead them to repentance and acceptance of how badly they had treated Joseph / Jesus (Acts 7:11 s.w.). Stephen's use of the same word for the sufferings of both Joseph and his brothers was surely to teach that Israel's affliction was in order to teach them what they had done to Joseph, and to thereby identify with Him and repent. And this is exactly the purpose of Israel's latter day afflictions as outlined in the Olivet prophecy, and likewise the reason for the new Israel experiencing them- to help us identify with our crucified Lord. The same word is used in Rom. 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?". Here Paul lists the kinds of tribulation outlined in the Olivet prophecy and assures his first century readers that these will never separate them from God's love- he clearly expected the prophecy to have a first century fulfilment. Likewise the Lord foresaw the possibility of the "great tribulation" coming upon the first century church (Rev. 2:22), and

uses the same term "great tribulation" to describe the experiences of those Jewish Christians who would finally be saved (Rev. 7:14).

21:13 *It shall turn out to be your opportunity to give a witness*- This is Luke's equivalent of Matthew and Mark predicting that the Gospel will be preached to all nations. Luke's angle on this is that the preaching will arise out of persecution and fleeing from it- which is just what happened in the first century.

But the AV speaks of how when a believer is persecuted, "it shall turn to you for a testimony". What does this really mean? For me, the most satisfactory explanation would be that the Angels give a positive testimony of the faithful believer in the court of Heaven. Or could it mean that the way we respond to our trials during the tribulation will determine our verdict at the judgment? It will be a testimony in our favour at the day of judgment. In view of this, "Settle it *therefore* in your hearts" to make this witness in God's strength (Lk. 21:14). "In the endurance of you (in the tribulation), ye will gain the souls of you" (Lk. 21:19 Marshall's Interlinear). The run up to the tribulation will provoke a "praying always, that ye may be accounted worthy... to stand before the Son of man" (Lk. 21:36). Peter describes the tribulation of the believers in the run up to AD70 (and therefore the last days too) as judgment taking place on the house of God, in which even the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet.4:17,18). This suggests that the last generation of believers will only be saved due to their response to the tribulation which comes upon them; but even then, only by the skin of their teeth. Lot in Sodom and the parable of the virgins, among others, are hints that the last generation of believers will be in a weak state.

For those who suffer persecution, prison etc. for the Lord's sake, "it shall turn to you for a testimony" (Lk. 21:13). When? How? Surely in that these things will be 'gone through' with them at judgment as a testimony to their faithfulness.

21:14 *Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate beforehand how to answer*- They were to decide so definitely not to work out their answer ahead of time, because their answer or testimony was with God (:13). He had made an answer / testimony for them in the court of Heaven; and He would put that in their mouths at the right time.

21:15 *For I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to contradict*- This is alluding to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say". This persecution led to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into

the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. We have earlier shown how all these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. This verse also suggests that the gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev. 11:6). The fact they are given personally by Christ would indicate that in some way, Christ is already back at this stage. Time and again we will see how the prophecies of events in the last days are ambiguous as to whether Christ is already back at the time of their fulfilment, or whether they herald his return. Seeing that we will never know the exact time of Christ's return, this is understandable. Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the three and a half year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution. Note that the gifts were given "before the day of the Lord" in AD70 too. It is possible that because of this possession of the gifts by 'Elijah', false teachers within the ecclesia at the end will also claim to possess them (Mt. 24:24), so convincingly that all but the elect within the ecclesia will be duped into following them. Yet it must be stressed that it is a feature of the gifts that they are unmistakable and obvious to identify (cp. Acts 4:16); it will be evident enough if and when they are poured out in the last days.

*21:16 But you shall be delivered up even by your parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they shall kill some of you-* This indicates that the persecuting power will infiltrate the ecclesias, as the Jews and Romans did to the early church in order to bring about their persecution. Mic. 7:2-9 is a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. But embedded in it are words which are quoted in Lk. 21:16 and Mt. 10:36 concerning the latter day tribulation of the believers: "the son dishonoureth the father...a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In similar manner, some of the prophecies of Israel's latter day sufferings speak in the same context of those of Christ. Mic. 5:1 is an example: "...he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel (Christ) with a rod upon the cheek". The whole of Amos 5 can be scanned for connections with both the future tribulation of Israel, and also the sufferings of Christ. See on Mk. 13:13.

"Some of you shall they cause to be put to death... but there shall not an hair of your head perish" can only be reconciled by appreciating how miraculously the disciples were preserved in order to inspire and co-ordinate the rest of the body. Perhaps a similar group of elders ("the two witnesses"?) will be preserved in the last days too.

21:17 *And you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake*- This hating by all men may imply a world-wide persecution. Matthew: "hated by all nations". But the Gospel will then be preached to "all nations" (Mk. 13:10). It seems that the persecution will result in preaching, perhaps through highly publicized legal cases. If the Gospel is taken to all nations, then this will not need to happen. "For my Name's sake" is a phrase which rarely occurs outside of the Olivet prophecy; one other time is in the upper room discourse, which is John's parallel with the Olivet prophecy as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here we read again that the believers will be "hated... for My Name's sake" (Jn. 15:18,21). But in John 15 the Lord seems to be angling His words not just to the twelve, but to all in Him; for His reasoning is that the world's attitude to Him will be their attitude to us, and all in Him will suffer as He did. Again we can conclude that John, the latest of the Gospels, was re-adjusting the emphasis of the Olivet prophecy, knowing that it had been rescheduled and would not fully come true in an early coming of Christ in the first century.

21:18 *But not a hair of your head shall perish*- Primarily concerning the disciples, seeing that some believers were to die for their faith in the period around AD70 (cp. :16). The figure of not a hair of the head perishing is used in the Old Testament concerning sudden deliverance from what seemed like certain death, e.g. Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14:45. This is fitting, seeing that "except those days should be shortened there should no flesh be saved" (Mt. 24:22). It is also the language of the faithful few among an Israel who wouldn't stand up and be counted being miraculously preserved from Babylonian tribulation (Dan. 3:27). There are many instructive parallels here with the latter day tribulation, which the majority of natural and spiritual Israel may try to avoid by some tokenistic acquiescence to the dictates of the King of Babylon.

We must lose our lives, one way or the other. If we lose them for Christ, we will find eternal life. If we keep them for ourselves, we will lose that eternal life. This teaching is picked up by the Lord in Lk. 21:16-18, in stating that some of His people would be put to death, but actually, not a hair of their heads would perish. Surely He was saying that yes, they would lose their lives, but in reality they would find eternal life. Those men and women who died on crosses, were burnt as human torches, were thrown to the lions... the Lord foresaw them, and implied that their sacrifice was *in principle* the process that must be gone through by each of us: a losing, a resigning, of our life and all the things that life consists of in everyday experience. Either we die to sin now, living out in practice the theory of baptism, or we will die to sin in rejection at judgment day; sin has its end in death (Ez. 21:25; Dan. 9:24), either now, or then. So we may as well die to the things of sin in this life.

21:19 *In your patience, you shall win your souls*- The idea may be that those who endure the final tribulation will be saved; they will be the only generation who will not die. For they will be immortalized at the Lord's return. The same group are in view in Mt. 10:22: "He that endures to the end shall be saved". Although it is the Lord who purchases / redeems ["wins"] our souls, we must play our part in this. It is our endurance in faith in His work for us which enables all this to become true for us in reality.

21:20 *But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that her desolation is at hand*- Jerusalem was truly "compassed with armies" in Hezekiah's time, and perhaps the Lord has this in mind when He predicted that Jerusalem would again be like this in the last days. His subsequent warning to those in the country areas not running into Jerusalem for refuge is also an allusion to the situation in Hezekiah's time- for this was exactly what happened then.

We need not get overly worried about the supposed discrepancies between prophecy and its historical fulfilment. Such differences don't negate the Divine inspiration of the original prophecy- rather do they show how God's intentions can be worked out in different ways because of the open-ended approach He takes to human response. Thus it's been observed that the siege of Jerusalem in AD66-70 doesn't exactly follow the descriptions in Lk. 19:41-44 and 21:20-24. This would be because there were within the Olivet prophecy a number of possible scenarios of what could happen *if* the believers fled the city as commanded; and of course, *if* Israel repented and accepted Christ at His AD70 'coming' in judgment. Additionally we must remember that this prophecy was only having its initial fulfilment in AD70- the final fulfilment will be in our last days.

The placing of the abomination is what will bring about the desolation, according to Mk. and Mt. On Revelation 17 and 18 I suggest that the whore Babylon will enthrone herself in Jerusalem, through the building of some Islamic and blasphemous religious building or capital there. And this will lead to her desolation. Luke records the Lord as saying that *when* Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, *then* His people should know that the "desolation" of it was near. The desolation is therefore of Jerusalem rather than specifically the temple (Lk. 21:20). The abominating desolation could therefore refer to the invading armies. Seeing *them* was the signal to flee. "Abomination" in the Old Testament typically refers to idolatry or paganism. One interpretation is that the desolator would place some pagan religious symbol in the temple. But this is the sign to flee, and this was only done by the Romans after the city had fallen. That, therefore, doesn't really fit the requirements of the prophecy. The AD70 interpretation notes the pagan standards of the Roman legions, but even they were not placed in the temple. This was

defended until the end, until the Romans forced entry, pulled it down and burnt it. As with many details of this prophecy, a future fulfilment is required. And yet we need to note that such desolation was only a visual reflection of the abomination the Jews had committed in the temple: "Because of the evil of your doings, and because of the *abominations* which ye have committed; therefore is your land a *desolation* and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day" (Jer. 44:22). The abomination which caused desolation may not simply refer to some pagan symbols in the temple area. Josephus records that the Jewish zealots came into the Most Holy place, "placed an imposter in office as high priest, and ordained unqualified misfits to the priesthood" (*The Jewish Wars* 4.3.6–9; 4.5.4). The pagan Idumeans were invited into the Most Holy by the zealots in order to murder the chief priest Annas.

The word "desolation" is used again about the desolation of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). Yet Babylon will be judged according to what it did to God's people- the judgment for 'desolating' will be 'desolation'. Yet the Olivet prophecy clearly intended the Roman armies to be the means of the desolation, but I suggest that Revelation extends the prophecy by giving more detail, and describing the system of desolation as 'Babylon'. And that system clearly has similarities with Rome- it could have been fulfilled in Rome, but because the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled, we can look for another equivalent of the enigmatic 'Babylon' of the last days. The "desolation" referred to is clearly to be understood as the fulfilment of Dan. 9:26,27 LXX, which says that the abomination that desolates will come "after the cutting off of Messiah the Prince". Whilst how long "after" is not defined, we are surely intended to understand that the desolating abomination comes soon after the death of Messiah: "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and *the end* thereof ("then shall *the end* come", Mt. 24:14) shall be with a flood, ("as the days of Noah..."), and unto *the end* shall be war; *desolations* are determined . . . and upon the temple of *abominations* shall come one that makes *desolate* (cp. "your house is left unto you desolate", Mt.23:38), even unto the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolated" (LXX). And yet note that that prophecy itself had had various potential fulfilments which didn't come true. So it is fair to think that it could have had a fulfilment in AD70, but this was again deferred- for the same reason as ever, Israel's lack of repentance.

21:21- see on Rev. 11:1.

*Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let them that are in the midst of her depart, and do not let them that are in the countryside enter therein-* As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by

doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk. 21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain" (Gen. 19:17). "Then let them which be in Judaea flee to the mountains" means that there will be Jewish believers in Jerusalem in the last days, seeing the whole prophecy has a latter day application. Dan. 12:1 says that in the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book", i.e. who are acceptable saints (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry.

This is the equivalent of the plea in Revelation to flee out of Babylon, the latter day Islamic complex to be built in Jerusalem on the temple mount.

The same word was used by the Lord in introducing the Olivet prophecy in Mt. 23:33: "How can you *escape* the condemnation of Gehenna?". The way of escape was through obedience to His word. Clearly the Lord intended His words to be fulfilled in that immediate generation; but fleeing to the mountains did not bring ultimate salvation because the Lord did not return as intended. His coming has been rescheduled, and perhaps utter salvation for the Jewish remnant in the land will likewise depend upon 'fleeing'. The Old Covenant had specified that Israel would flee before their enemies if they broke the covenant; the command to 'flee' may therefore be an invitation to accept guilt for their sin, and thereby be saved through the very act of recognizing the justice of their judgment. For this is the essence of the salvation of every man in Christ. It could be that Rev. 12:6 provides more details, in speaking of the faithful fleeing into the wilderness and thereby being saved. This was the way to flee the coming condemnation (Mt. 23:33; Lk. 3:7). The Lord's words require[d] some faith to accept, because if Jerusalem were surrounded by armies, how could the faithful flee? Josephus explains that the Roman legions did in fact withdraw for a time, allowing civilians to flee (B.J.2.19.6,7).

"To the mountains" is better, 'toward'. Clearly this was capable of fulfilment in the Jewish war, in a fairly literal sense. But what is the latter day equivalent? "The mountains" could be an intensive plural for the one great, special, obvious mountain. The same word is found earlier in the chapter- the Lord is saying these words sitting on "the mount" of Olives (Mt. 24:3). And it is to that mount that He will return, according to Acts 1:12 and Zechariah 14. It could be, therefore, in a literal or figurative sense, an appeal to move towards the mount of Olives to meet Him at His return. Perhaps in a literal, geographical sense, that area will be the only

area left by the invading armies, and they will surround the faithful Jewish remnant on that mount- and then the Lord shall come. But such speculation is unhelpful, because the principle of prophecy is that when it happens, then we shall understand. I do not believe we are intended to work out a sequence of events ahead of time. Indeed, given the conditional nature of Bible prophecy, that is impossible to do anyway.

*21:22 For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled-* This is the day ["days" may be an intensive plural referring to the one great day] when vengeance will be poured out; God will take revenge on the system which has persecuted His natural and spiritual people (2 Thess. 1:8 s.w.). Revelation puts this in terms of the beast system receiving revenge for all she has recently done to the Lord's people. In a sense, "all" the written prophecies and words of God shall come to their final fulfilment in the Lord's return.

*21:23 Woe to them that are with child in those days, and to those nursing babies!*- This may well match Paul's warning against marrying in the last days in 1 Cor. 7. He understood the Olivet prophecy as having the real prophecy of fulfilment in his generation. As He hung on the cross, our Lord quoted this part of His Olivet prophecy to the women who stood by (Lk. 23:29 "blessed are [those] who never gave suck" = Mt. 24:19 "Woe to them... who give suck", s.w.), concerning the sufferings of the believers in the 'last days'. Here we see His matchless selflessness; going out of His own sufferings, to think, with anguish, how they would be experienced by His followers in the tribulation. "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves... for if they do these things (to) a green tree (the spiritually healthy Lord Jesus), what shall be done (to) the dry", the spiritually barren tree of Israel. This is a superb essay in the Lord's selflessness and minimizing of his own sufferings: he felt that what he was going through was less than what the spiritually weak would have to go through in the AD70 tribulation (and that of the last days). In the other 11 occurrences of "woe" in Matthew, the objects of the "woe" are clearly the unfaithful and the condemned; this category of those "with child" are therefore not amongst those who obediently 'flee'. Lk. 21:23 states that they would be amongst those who would suffer the "wrath upon this people". In Lk. 23:29 the Lord clearly envisaged the women of His generation, the ones who lined the road to Golgotha, as experiencing the trauma He predicted in the Olivet prophecy. And yet it is clear enough that the final fulfilment is yet to come- because His coming was rescheduled.

*For there shall be great distress upon the land, and wrath upon this people-* Paul's later comment that "Wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:16) suggests he believed that these words were being fulfilled completely at his time. But the Lord did not come, many aspects of the prophecy were left unfulfilled, and the complete fulfilment has yet to come.

"Great distress" could mean 'the greatest ever distress'. This would connect with Dan. 12:1- that immediately prior to the Lord's return, there will be a time of distress for Israel such as they have never experienced- far worse than the holocaust. The LXX uses this same word for "distress" or "tribulation" in several passages pregnant with latter day significance:

"The day of my [Jacob's] *distress*" at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3)

"The *anguish* of his [Joseph's] soul" at the hands of his half brethren and the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)

"I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel's latter day tribulations.

"Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy" (2 Kings 19:3)- Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.

"The time of Jacob's *trouble*" from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7)

"There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days.

21:24 *And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations-* The downtreading of Jerusalem during the tribulation, the "times" of the Gentiles, the three and a half year [1260 days, 42 months, "time, times and a half"] domination of the land, will be long enough for some Jews to be led captive into the "all nations" surrounding Israel who form the coalition of the beast. Such mass deportations would be performed in conscious imitation of the Babylonian and Assyrian dominations. The Greek word for "sword" is literally a dagger; we would have expected the more common word for sword to be used. But we recall images of Islamist extremists killing those whom they consider apostate by cutting their throats with the edge of a knife / dagger; and it seems this is what we can expect. The phrase is alluding to Jer. 21:7 LXX, where those in Judah who escaped the plagues and other calamities [which have also been mentioned here in Lk. 21] are then slain by the edge of the sword of the Babylonians. The Babylonian invasion clearly is the prototype of Jerusalem's latter day tribulation.

*And Jerusalem shall be trodden under foot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled-* The "times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) appears to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25. This however is going to be particularly true of the final period when Jerusalem falls to the Gentiles and is trodden underfoot. When that downtreading is completed, then likewise the opportunity for Gentile response will close.

Zech. 12:3 is being alluded to: "In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people (i.e. all around Israel, as this often means): all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it". The Septuagint renders the first phrase as "a stone trodden down by the Gentiles", clearly alluded to here. Those who are 'gathered together' against Jerusalem must be the Arab neighbours of Israel, according to the Zechariah context. The rejected likewise will be burdened with a heavy stone (Mt. 18:6), showing that they will share the judgments of Israel's enemies.

The allusion is to Dan. 8:13: "The transgression of desolation gave both the sanctuary and the host (i.e. the people of Israel) to be *trodden underfoot*". This part of Luke 21 is clearly alluding to Zechariah 14, a prophecy about the final desolation of Jerusalem:

<b>Luke 21</b>	<b>Zechariah 14</b>
20. Jerusalem surrounded by armies	2. All nations against Jerusalem to battle
20. The desolation of Jerusalem is near	2. The city shall be taken
21. Let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains	5. You shall flee to the ... mountains
22. Great distress in the land	2. Houses ransacked, women raped.
24. Led away captive into all nations	2. Half the city shall go into captivity
24. Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles.	12:3 LXX Jerusalem a stone trodden down by the Gentiles.

The context of Zechariah 14 is clearly concerning the last days and the literal appearance of Messiah in Israel. The way the Olivet Prophecy alludes to it, indeed is based upon it, shows that it too requires reference to the last days. Any limited fulfilment in AD70 was only a partial foretaste of the final outworking of the prophecy. Dan. 8:13 itself was a prophecy which had already had various possible fulfilments and had already had its fulfilment rescheduled a few times. It is therefore unsurprising if its intended, or possible, fulfilment in AD70 was again rescheduled.

It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" for three and a half years, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 'Jebus', the old name for Jerusalem, means 'downtrodden'. This hints that the liberation of Jebus at the beginning of David's reign was seen by Christ as typical of the time when He would liberate Jerusalem from downtreading, at his return. This

suggests that the times of Gentile domination of Jerusalem are to be ended by the establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's second coming; we are yet to see, therefore, a Gentile domination of Jerusalem before Christ's coming.

"The times of the Gentiles" are often taken to have finished in 1967. But at least three major problems arise with this:

- 1) The temple site, Biblical 'Zion', is still not totally under Jewish control due to the presence of the Mosque there.
- 2) "Trodden down" has clear links with Dan. 8:13 and Rev. 11:2, which describe the temple being blasphemously desecrated for certain periods of time. How can they have ended in 1967, seeing the 'Dome of the Rock' still stands there? And 1967 minus 2300 day/years (Dan. 8:13) or 1260 day/years (Rev. 11:2) do not appear to yield any significant starting points.
- 3) The times of Gentile opportunity, as some read it, are still with us now as much as they were in 1967. If anything, numbers of baptisms have mushroomed *since* 1967, notably in distant Gentile lands.

21:25 *And there shall be signs in sun, moon and stars*- Joseph's dream clearly identifies these symbols as representing Israel. The passages which make this same identification are many: Gen. 37:9,10; 15:5; 22:17; Amos 8:8-10; Micah 3:6; Song of Solomon 6:10; Is. 24:23; Jer. 33:20-26; JoeI 2:10,30-32; 3:15; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12; 8:12; 12:1. Jer. 31:35,36 is likely the Old Testament passage the Lord specifically had in mind: "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever".

*And upon the earth distress of nations*- The reference is to distress amongst the nations within the earth / land promised to Abraham. There are many prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel of Babylon being at war with the neighbouring nations who supported her in the attack on Jerusalem, e.g. concerning Ammon (Ez. 21:20) and Tyre (Ez. 26:7). Ammon is mentioned as *escaping* out of the hand of the king of the North during his invasion of Israel and Jerusalem (Dan. 11:41). This shows that there will be much inter-Arab conflict both before and during Israel's prolonged desolation period. "The sea and the waves roaring" at the time of Israel's final suffering is a figure taken from Jer. 49:23 concerning the nations around Israel being like the troubled sea in their fighting with each other. However, the outstanding inter-Arab conflicts will be temporarily forgotten in the last days to concentrate on a combined push against Jerusalem. But once this is captured, the old rivalries will suddenly violently surface, which is how God will destroy the invaders and save the

righteous remnant who are still barely alive in the sewers and basements of Jerusalem.

*In perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the waves-* The Greek word translated "perplexity" is used in the LXX concerning the final tribulation of Israel (Lev. 26:16; Dt. 28:22; Is. 5:30; 8:20 LXX). It seems that the beasts of Dan. 7 are only different aspects of the one great beast which finally emerges. Daniel sees them all come up together after the waves of the sea are troubled (Dan. 7:3), connecting with the Lord's description of the last day powers around Israel in the same way (Lk. 21:25).

*21:26 Men will be fainting for fear in expectation of the things which are coming on the world-* We are to be in expectation of the Lord's return (s.w. 2 Pet. 3:12,13,14); the Lord comes on the unworthy when they are not expecting Him (Lk. 12:46 s.w.). The magnitude of the world's problems will block the vision of worldly people, so that they refuse or are rendered unable to look beyond them to the things of the Lord and His Kingdom "coming on the world".

*For the powers of the heavens shall be shaken-* The Greek phrase is used only elsewhere in Rev. 6:13. This vision is clearly an expansion upon the Olivet prophecy. There, the stars fall "as a fig tree casts her unripe figs". This too is the language of the Olivet prophecy (Mt. 24:32). The lack of spiritual maturity in Israel is related to the stars [of Israel- see on *Sun... moon... stars*] falling. The appearance of comets would certainly give the impression of falling stars, and I suggest that the main fulfilment will be in terms of things visibly seen in the sky, as hard proof to all the world that the Lord Jesus is returning. And it is this which provokes chronic fear in the hearts of the worldly. The events of judgment day will be a 'shaking' of the world, including the faithful (Lk. 6:48 the house built on the rock could not be "shaken", s.w.). Heb. 12:26,27 surely allude here, saying that just as the earth shook when the old covenant was instituted, so the "heavens" would also be shaken. The suggestion of the context is that this day of shaking both heaven and earth was almost upon the readership- who were Hebrews, Jewish Christians.

*21:27 And then shall they see-* In Matthew, when "all the tribes of the earth / land mourn [in repentance]... then shall they see the Son of man coming". Some in Israel must repent before Christ returns. The Lord refers to this in speaking to the Jews who crucified Him: "You shall see [s.w.] the Son of Man... coming in the clouds of Heaven" (Mt. 26:64). They would see that all too late, as part of the process of their condemnation- to realize it was all true, and it is too late to do anything about it. The Lord had earlier used the same idea, in saying that that group would only "see" Him again when they said "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 13:35). They would see that and say that all too late. The Lord's words clearly suggest they of that generation

would see His return in glory. But His coming was delayed, and they did not. But they will at the last day, for they will be resurrected to face judgment and condemnation. The chronological issues need not worry us too much- i.e. when will they be resurrected, at precisely what point on the timeline of these events. The meaning of time will surely be collapsed around the Lord's return. This will be the final fulfilment of the prophecy that they shall look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn (Rev. 1:7; Jn. 19:37; "look" is s.w. "see" in Mt. 24:30). The invitation of course is to look upon the crucified Christ now and mourn in repentance; for we shall have to do this one way or the other, either now in repentance, or too late in condemnation.

*The Son of Man coming in a cloud-* Dan. 7:14. The language of clouds and then Angels (Mt. 24:31) is reminiscent of the Lord's ascension, at which the Angels promised His return "in like manner"; and the same language is used of His return in Acts 1:7. This precludes any invisible 'coming' in AD70. Rather than thinking that the Lord somehow 'came' in AD70 in some metaphorical manner, I would suggest that the literal language is such that we can only conclude that His literal return has been delayed. Otherwise we end up forcing the obviously literal into the metaphorical.

The moment of the second coming is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This makes any application of *parousia* to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Mt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Mt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Mt. 24:30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16). In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Mt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70. Indeed I would argue that since *parousia* means a literal presence, it's not the case that the prophecy received a primary fulfilment in AD70; rather is it that the literal return of Christ was intended then, but was rescheduled. At best, the *parousia* element of the predictions had no partial fulfilment in AD70. The flow of the prophecy is indicated by the repetition of words like "then" : "*Then* shall they deliver you up... *then* shall many be offended... *then* shall the end come... *then* let them which be in Judea... *then* shall be great tribulation... *then* if any man shall say unto you, Here is Christ... *immediately after the tribulation of those days* ("in those days, after that tribulation", Mk. 13:24)... *then* shall appear the sign of the Son of man... *then* shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming" (Mt. 24). There is no suggestion here of any break in application, from AD70

to the last days. If the reference to Christ coming in glory with the Angels is accepted as referring to the last days, but the earlier verses of the prophecy to AD70 alone, we have to find the point where Christ breaks from AD70 to the last days. And I would suggest such a point cannot be found.

"In the clouds" clearly alludes to His ascension in clouds, and the promise that He would return "in like manner" (Acts 1:11), presumably meaning in clouds to the same Mount of Olives. Again we are invited to understand these as literal clouds, just as the signs in the heavenly bodies are likewise to be understood. At His coming, the figurative will pass away and planet earth and those who dwell upon it will be faced with the ultimate reality- the personal, literal coming of God's Son to earth.

*With power and great glory-* The very words used by the Lord in the model prayer of Mt. 6:13 concerning the power and glory of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Lord to establish the Kingdom is clearly yet future and did not occur in AD70. This is the time when "the Son of Man shall come in the glory [s.w.] of His Father with His angels, and then shall He repay every man according to his deeds" (16:27; 25:31). Likewise, this is "the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory [s.w.], [and] you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mt. 19:28). Such a judgment and coming with Angels never occurred in AD70. John's equivalent of this is to emphasize that in essence, the believers behold Christ's glory now, insofar as they perceive the wonder and moral pinnacle of His achievement for us on the cross (Jn. 17:24). Col. 3:4 teaches that "When Christ who is our life [i.e. our basis of resurrection] shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with Him in glory". His coming in glory will be ours, in that we will have been snatched away to meet with Him and will come with Him to Zion. And yet the next verse speaks as if now, at this point, the Angels are sent to gather the elect. But these chronological discrepancies are no real issue for the believer if we accept that the meaning of time must be changed around the time of Christ's coming, as must the meaning of space [if Einstein's theory of relativity is correct]. This would explain all practical concerns about space and time issues relating to the day of judgment. Another window on the apparent chronological discrepancies is the consideration that there are various possible potential scenarios, which will work out according to the speed and nature of the spiritual response of both natural and spiritual Israel.

21:28 *But when these things begin to happen, look up, lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near-* Ps. 24:9 clearly states that when the gatekeepers of Zion lift up their heads [to God in truth], then the King of glory will come in. And the Lord here applies these words to His true

people of the last days- they are to likewise lift up their heads [so that] their redemption will draw nigh, or be hastened.

"When these things begin to come to pass, then look up (Gk. un-bend), and lift up your heads" may suggest that the believers will be bowed down in bondage in some sense. Alternatively, we can read it simply as a command to stand up (as NIV), which would connect with the slumbering virgins, *none* of them standing ready to welcome their Lord as they should have been. It is evident from a close reading of the Olivet prophecy that the Lord is using his pronouns carefully. Sometimes He speaks of "ye", sometimes of "they". It seems that the "ye" refer to the disciples and the faithful remnant in the latter day ecclesia, and the "they" either to the natural Jews or to "the many" (majority) in the ecclesia who will fall away. "*They* shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud... when these things (leading up to the Son of man coming) begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up *your* heads" (Lk. 21:27,28). This may suggest that the majority, the "they" category, are shocked by the coming of the Lord, but the faithful minority stand up from their slumber and are expecting his coming.

"When these things begin to come to pass, then look up (Gk. 'unbend'- as if the depression of the faithful is partly lifted by discerning the nearness of Christ's return), and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh". These are words which can only apply to the last generation; and they self-evidently imply that therefore that last generation does know for sure that Christ is about to come. Just two verses later, the Lord spoke of how in the Spring "Ye see and know *of your own selves* that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh" (Lk. 21:30,31). There is an instinctive sense within us concerning the change of the seasons; and this will be the same in the minds of the faithful as they sense the Lord's return approaching. There will be no need for magazine articles expounding "signs of the times"; we will not need any man to say unto us "The time draweth near" because we will know *of our own selves* that the coming of Christ is near (Lk. 21:7,8 should be read in the context of v.30,31). The relationship between Solomon and his bride in the Song of Solomon is typical of that between Christ and His church; and significantly, therefore, she senses his approach, she hears his voice telling her that he is coming, even before she sees him (Song 2:8).

We were redeemed by the blood of Jesus; and yet His return and judgment of us is also our "day of redemption" (Lk. 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30). Yet that day was essentially the cross; but it is also in the day of judgment. Likewise, we are "justified" by the blood of Jesus. Yet the idea of justification is a declaring righteous after a judgment; as if the cross was our judgment, and through our belief in the Lord we were subsequently declared justified, as we will be in the Last Day.

21:29 *And he told them a parable: Behold the fig tree and all the trees-* Lk. 13:6-9 records another parable of the fig tree, upon which that in the Olivet prophecy is based. Jesus, the dresser of God's vineyard of Israel, came seeking spiritual fruit on the fig tree, for the three years of his ministry. Because of the lack of it, the tree was cut down. Christ said "Now (i.e. towards the end of the tribulation period?) learn a parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32). It is tempting to read this as effectively meaning 'Now learn *the* parable of the fig tree', seeing that the parable of the Olivet prophecy is so similar to the previous fig tree parable. Spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel is to be associated with spiritual fruit on "all the trees" within the Eden / earth / land promised to Abraham; this will be the fruit of the witness made to them all by the Elijah ministry and the two witnesses of Rev. 11.

21:30 *When they shoot forth, you see it, and know of yourselves that the summer is now near-* Or, "you know in your own selves". Seeing the repentance of Israel will lead to the faithful perceiving that the end is near. This perhaps alludes to the same idea as in 2 Pet. 1:19, that the day star shall arise in the hearts of the believers just before the Lord comes.

One way to look at this is that summer stood for harvest, obviously so in this context of fruit on a fig tree. But harvest was clearly a metaphor for judgment upon Israel, which is the context and burden of the Olivet prophecy. The Lord has lamented that the fig tree of Israel has nothing but leaves- and because of that, He had uttered judgment upon her (Mt. 21:19,20). So the Lord could be simply repeating this in parabolic terms. The judgment / harvest / Summer was to come upon the fig tree whilst she had only leaves [and not fruit] on her tender branch. And yet the language of 'shooting forth' [Gk. germinating] in Lk. 21:30 suggests that more than mere leaves are in view. Summer will only come once there is fruit to harvest. That seems the point.

The shooting forth of the fig tree is given as the special sign that the Lord will return (Lk. 21:30). This must be understood in the context of the Lord coming to the fig tree in Mk. 11; He sought for at least the beginnings of fruit shooting forth, but found only leaves. And therefore He cursed the fig tree. He evidently saw the shooting forth of the fig tree as a figure of Israel's acceptance of Him, however immaturely. Likewise the parable of Lk. 13:6-9 makes the same connection between fruit on the fig tree and repentance within Israel. "Learn a (the) parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32) may suggest that we are to understand the fig tree parable in the light of these other fig tree parables. And there are several OT links between fruit on the fig and spiritual fruit in Israel (Mic. 7:1 cp. Mt. 7:15,16; Hos. 9:10; Hab. 3:17,18). When the branch of Israel "is now become tender", i.e. immediately this happens, we are to know that the

eternal Summer of God's Kingdom is nigh (Mt. 24:32 RV). The tenderness of the branch is surely to be connected with the hard heart of Israel becoming tender through their acceptance of Jesus and the new covenant. When we see just the beginnings of Israel's repentance, through a remnant responding, we are to know that "He is near, even at the doors" (Mt. 24:33 RV). All this evidence steers us away from the idea that the fig tree became tender through the re-establishment of the nation of Israel- and towards an understanding that this is all about Israel's repentance.

The fig tree was to "shoot forth" (Lk. 21:30) or 'germinate' (Young), witnessed by its putting forth of leaves (Mk. 13:28) and tender branches (Mt. 24:32). When the fig tree puts forth leaves there are often immature, unripe figs amongst them. Thus Jesus inspected the fig tree outside Jerusalem to see if it had any fruit, and cursed it because it did not. "The time of *figs* was not yet", i.e. it was not reasonable to find fully developed fruit on it. The fig tree referred to the nation of Israel; Jesus expected to find at least the beginnings of some spiritual fruit, but due to the chronic dearth of response to his message, Jesus cursed the nation and dried it up (Mk. 11:13,14,20). This would lead us to interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. It may well be that the whole of the Olivet prophecy has reference to a final three and a half year tribulation of the believers just prior to the second coming, and that during this time there will be a period of zealous witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles. This fits into place with the fig tree parable; this preaching starts to produce some degree of response from Israel, and then "all (is) fulfilled" in the full manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. The parable says that as surely as Summer follows Spring, so those who see the blossoming of the fig tree in the parable, will see the Kingdom. Maybe this is to be taken literally; there may be a literal gap of a few weeks/months (as between Spring and Summer) between the first signs of Jewish repentance, and all being fulfilled. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). The Greek *kairos* translated "times" is also translated "opportunity"; the Gentiles' opportunity to hear the Gospel is fast running out. There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord". We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing.

21:31 *Even so, you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near-* The structure of the argument suggests that "these things" specifically refers to the shooting forth of the fig tree:

Mt. 24:32	Mt. 24:33
When [Gk. <i>hotan</i> ]	When [Gk. <i>hotan</i> ]
His branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves	You see all these things
You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i> ]	You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i> ]
That summer is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]	That it is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]; Lk. 21:32 "That the Kingdom of God is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> "]".

The "Summer" meant 'harvest', and that was a metaphor for judgment. Verse 33 parallels this by saying that "it" is near. The "it" may well refer to the destruction of the temple, which is the context of the whole discussion; although Lk. 21:32 supplies "the Kingdom of God". The Lord is bringing the discourse to a close by returning to the question which provoked it: "When shall these things be?". And He appears to be saying in the first century context that so long as only leaves remained on the fig tree of Israel, then the Summer of harvest judgment upon her was going to come. And yet the Lord here is using language with two or more meanings, as Scripture often does. In the latter day context, He seems to be saying that once spiritual fruit is beginning on the Israel fig tree, then this is the ultimate sign that the ultimate end is near.

The Lord introduces his Olivet prophecy by saying that it was no use listening to those who said "The time draws near"- instead, he went on to say, 'You must personally match the spiritual and physical situation you find yourself in with what I'm describing'. And at the end of the prophecy, he hammered this home again: "When (the trees) now shoot forth, ye see it, and know of your own selves that Summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things... know ye" (Lk. 21:30,31 RV). The very personal feeling within us that Summer is near is likened to our knowledge of the imminence of the Lord's coming; you can't be told by anyone else that Summer's coming, you see the signs, and you know within your own self.

Perhaps the very last generation *will* know the time of Christ's return. "Likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, *know* ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Lk. 21:31). As surely as trees bud and then Summer comes, so when we see the signs of Lk. 21:24-26 in Israel, we will know that the Lord is really at hand. It is only to the unworthy that the Lord comes unexpectedly. The majority of generations, including the disciples to whom Christ primarily spoke those words concerning not knowing the hour, have of course not known the day or hour. But there seems absolutely no point in the Lord giving us *any* signs if in fact the last generation cannot foresee with some certainty the time of His coming. Surely Yahweh has revealed all His plans to His servants the prophets? As a woman knows within herself the approximate time of childbirth although not the day or hour, so we should know that the day of new birth is approaching- so Paul's reasoning goes in 1 Thess. 5. He warns that for those who do not watch, the day of Christ's coming will be a day of

"sudden destruction... as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). Surely the picture here is of a woman whose time of delivery comes unexpectedly upon her, with complications that result in her dying in childbirth. As a woman who knows the time of delivery is very near will behave in an appropriately careful way, so will the faithful of the last generation who likewise know that the Lord's coming is nigh. The same mixture of seriousness and joyful anticipation will be seen in us too, who are watching and loving the appearing of Christ.

21:32 *Truly I say to you: This generation shall not pass away-* This is similar to the Lord's teaching that some of His generation would not die until they had seen the coming of the Kingdom (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27). His saying may not be linked directly to the fig tree parable, as if to say 'The generation that sees the fig tree fruit will not pass away until...'. Rather He may be concluding His message by again making clear that the entire prophecy was going to come true in that generation. Seeing that lifespans were not much over 40 years at that time, even AD70 would not have seen many of that generation alive. He says elsewhere that the actual people He was speaking with would see these things come true and see Him coming in glory. But this potential possibility was disallowed from happening in that generation by the refusal of Israel to repent and the weakness of spirituality and effort to spread the Gospel in those who did apparently believe into Christ. The transfiguration was hardly the main fulfilment of the Lord's words, even though the record of it directly follow the Lord's predictions. Like the events of AD70, it was at best a shadow fulfilment of the final coming of the Kingdom in visible power and glory. The use of "*this* generation" rather than "*that* generation" surely suggests the Lord hoped for and indeed intended a fulfilment of His words literally in that very generation. But that generation passed- because fruit on the fig tree was not found. Israel did not repent, and there was little spiritual fruit on those Jews who did accept Christ. All 38 NT occurrences of *genea*, "generation", clearly refer to the contemporary generation or group of listeners. Any attempt to interpret *genea* as referring to the race or nation of Israel becomes impossible because the text would require that the race or nation of Israel pass away at the Lord's second coming, but Israel are clearly envisaged as existing as a separate entity in the Millennial Kingdom.

*Until-* If the Lord had meant simply 'until' we would read simply *heos*. But here we have two Greek words- *heos an*, which together denote a sense of conditionality and uncertainty. This is understandable if we understand that the Lord is talking of how His coming *could be* in that generation- but that depended upon some conditions which were beyond Him to fulfil and which depended upon men.

*All things are accomplished*- AV "Be fulfilled". There is surely a word play between *ginomai* ["fulfilled"] and *genea* ["generation"]. That generation would not pass until all has 'become'. This is not the usual word used for the fulfilment of prophecies. When Matthew writes of the fulfilment of prophecies (and he does this often), the word *pleroo* is used. But here a much vaguer and more general word is used. Mark's record brings this out- the disciples ask when "all these things" would be "fulfilled" (*sunteleo*), and the Lord concludes the fig tree parable by saying "all these things" would be *ginomai* (Mk. 13:4,30). That would appear purposeful; the Lord held out the definite possibility for His return in the first century and the fulfilment of all things He had spoken of. But He was surely aware that this could be rescheduled, and so He used a word pregnant with the possibility that "that generation" would see the 'coming into being' of the scenario He was presenting. That generation [*ginomai*] could have been the fulfilment [*genea*] of all things, or they could have been at least the coming into being of that fulfilment; even if they failed to respond, they would not be without significance in bringing into being the ultimate fulfilment.

21:33 *Heaven and earth shall pass away*- This could simply be saying to the effect 'Even if heaven and earth could pass, which they cannot, there is even less possibility that My words shall not be fulfilled'. Mt. 5:18 seems to use the term in that sense- "Even until [*heos*, i.e. 'even if'] heaven and earth pass...". In this case, we are not to even bother trying to understand 'heaven and earth' as 'a system of things', although this is certainly how the term is used, especially in the context of the Jewish system. And yet later New Testament allusion to this passage seems to suggest we are justified in seeing some reference to the Jewish, Mosaic system of the first century. Heb. 12:26 speaks as if heaven and earth are to be so shaken by the blood of Christ and the new covenant that they will pass away just as Sinai shook at the inauguration of the old covenant. 2 Pet. 3:7-13 is perhaps the clearest statement- the 'heaven and earth' which "are now" in the first century were to pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells. Clearly 'heaven and earth' are not literal, because righteousness already dwells in literal Heaven, and the earth shall not be literally destroyed; this passing of 'heaven and earth' is patterned after the destruction of sinful *society* in Noah's time (2 Pet. 3:5). We note that the Olivet prophecy concludes with a warning that society would become like it was in the days of Noah. Clearly this major changeover did happen in the first century in that the Jewish and Mosaic system did finally pass away in AD70 with the destruction of the temple. And yet Peter's words also seem to demand application to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Clearly the heaven and earth of the Kingdom could have come in the first century, but 'all' that happened was that the

Jewish and Mosaic systems were ended; this was in itself created a requirement for a *new* 'heaven and earth' in which dwells righteousness, but that system has evidently not yet physically come on earth. In this sense, what happened in AD70 was a guarantee and a creation of the requirement for the new Kingdom to come- see on :32 *Be fulfilled*.

The Greek word *ge* ["earth"] is used often for the 'land' of Israel in the NT. We must remember that although the NT is written in Greek, it strongly reflects Hebrew usage of words. Again, the word commonly refers to the land of Israel. Consider some examples:

- "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King" (Mt. 5:34,35). This is alluding to the Jewish habit of swearing by their own land.

- "The kings of the earth take custom or tribute" (Mt. 17:25). The rulers of the earth were those ruling over Israel.

- "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth" (Mt. 23:35). The blood shed on the earth means that which was shed in the land.

- Heaven and earth passing away (Mt. 24:35) follows on from the Lord speaking of how all tribes of the earth / land would mourn in repentance (:30). He was speaking in the common OT idiom that used 'heaven and earth' for Israel. The nation would pass away in AD70, but His words would not.

*But my words shall not pass away*- The Lord uses *logos* here rather than any other term for 'words', perhaps because He perceived that it was the essence of what He was saying that would be fulfilled, rather than necessarily the very letter.

There seems a parallel with :30. "My words shall not pass away" is parallel with "This generation shall not pass away"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away" is parallel with "All these things [being] fulfilled". 'Heaven and earth' passing is therefore in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in fulfilment of all that was prophesied by the Lord. But there is then a parallel between "My words" and "this generation". The intention may be to show that that generation were to be identified with the Lord's words, and thereby with Himself. For whenever He elsewhere uses the term "My words", it is always in parallel to 'I Myself' (Mk. 8:38; Jn. 12:48; 14:23; 15:27). He was His words; He was the quintessential *logos*. And that generation were to be identified with them. If they did so, if the tender branch of the fig tree became one with the Messianic branch of the Old Testament prophecies, then all would be fulfilled in that generation.

21:34 *But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with partying, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly*- It could fairly be asked 'Why is there this warning, if

the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted?'. This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. Of if "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

Even in the first century context, Paul has to use these same Greek words in warning the believers not to be caught up in drunkenness (Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21). And "cares" is the word used in the parable of the sower; the thorns represented the cares of this life (Mt. 13:22). The appeal is therefore to those who have received the seed of the word, and have responded. Attempting to enjoy the good life will make believers no longer expectant of the Lord's return. "Unexpectedly" translates a Greek word only found elsewhere in 1 Thess. 5:3, of the "sudden destruction" which is to come upon those within the church who are saying "peace and safety". The attitude of "peace and safety" is therefore within the church rather than in the world; for it is here paralleled with eating and drinking without awareness of the imminence of the Lord's return. The state of the world in the very last days is going to be crying out for interpretation as a fulfilment of prophecy predicting the Lord's coming. And yet, it seems many within the church will be spiritually asleep and so engrossed with the good life that they do not perceive it. This is the distracting power of materialism and self-indulgence.

*21:35 For so shall it come upon all those that dwell on the face of all the earth-* As noted on :34, the unexpected nature of the Lord's coming is pertinent specifically to the believers who are engrossed with the good life and not aware of the imminence of His return. But they are associated here with all dwellers on the earth / land, for whom the Lord's coming will likewise be an abrupt, unexpected interruption. The dwellers on the earth / land in Revelation appear to specifically refer to those within the territory of the land promised to Abraham.

*21:36 But watch continually, praying that you may have strength to prevail against all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man-* See on Lk. 18:5; Rev. 8:1. It is by being continually aware of the Lord's presence, and the closeness of His coming, that we find moral strength to overcome. And this will be especially true of the final generation. Spiritual strength is clearly given in response to prayer and desire. The Lord doesn't simply advocate Bible study as the method for gaining strength.

"Prevail" or "escape" can mean 'to suddenly flee away from'- the same idea of sudden deliverance from persecution which cropped up in our notes on :18. Those who do not watch and pray will be unable to flee out of the tribulation, as Lot's wife was unable to. This idea of escaping connects with 1 Thess. 5:3 (this is just one of many links between the Olivet prophecy and Thessalonians): "When they shall say (in the ecclesia) Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them... and they shall not escape". The language of "peace and safety" is often used in the Old Testament to describe the calm words of Israel's false teachers, as they confidently asserted that all was spiritually well within Israel (Jer. 6:14; 5:12; 14:13; Mic. 3:5; Ez. 13:10; Dt. 29:19). Those who do not think that there is peace and safety in the ecclesia and who face up to the reality of 'watching and praying' to spiritually survive the last days, are those who will 'escape'.

Jacob's wrestling with the Angel was really a clinging on to him, pleading with tears for the blessing of forgiveness; and in this he was our example (Hos. 12:4-6). Lk. 21:36 RV speaks of the believer 'prevailing' with God in prayer. The 'struggles' of Moses in prayer are an example of this; through the desperation and spiritual culture of his pleading, he brought about a change even in God's stated purpose. See on Col. 2:1.

If our prayers really can help others on their salvation road- how we should use this! Remember Lot's deliverance for the sake of Abraham's prayers, whilst he unknowingly went about his daily life in those last hours. Reflect too how the Lord told us: "Pray ye may be accounted worthy to... be stood before the son of man". Not 'pray for thyself', singular, but for the whole community of the last days.

Angelic appearances to men have so often included an encouragement to "fear not" that we have every reason to imagine that those same words will be repeated to us when the angel calls. The Greek text of Lk. 21:36 further fills out the place of the angels in our judgment: "Pray always, that you may be accounted worthy... to be stood before the Son of man". This creates the picture of our guardian angel literally standing us up in acceptance before our Lord, as happened to Daniel. Ps. 1:5 can now take on a literal aspect: "The ungodly shall not stand [up] in the judgment". It is so fitting that the angel who is with us now in our every situation, will be with us in that supreme moment too.

Throughout Christ's discourses concerning his return, "watch" is the key-word (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:33-37; Lk. 12:37; 21:36). There are at least ten New Testament allusions to Christ's command for us to "watch" in the last days, and thus be found loving the appearing of Christ; this alone indicates how our lives should be characterized by this spirit of watching. I would go so far as to say that generally we seem almost

unaware of this emphasis. "Watch... watch... watch" is the cry that comes out from our Lord himself. It seems almost unknown to us that we are *commanded* by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, with a great sense of urgency, to live in this spirit of watchfulness for His return. It is easy to think that the command to watch means that we should scan Bible prophecies and compare them with current world events, and thereby see the coming of Christ approaching. However, this is not the idea behind the word "watch". We are told to watch precisely because we do *not* know the time of Christ's appearing; therefore Jesus cannot be telling us (in this command) to watch political developments as pointers towards the date of His return. "Watch" nearly always refers to watching our personal spirituality, and concerning ourselves with that of others'. The Hebrew word translated "watch" carries the idea of defending, holding on as a matter of life or death, enduring with stamina, being awake. Thus Habakkuk speaks of "watching", i.e. being spiritually sensitive, to what God is going to tell him (Hab. 2:1). Doing a study of New Testament allusions to Christ's command to "watch" yields conclusions which may seem unpleasantly negative to some. In Greek, the verb 'to watch' is related to the noun 'watch', referring to soldiers guarding something, or the period of guard duty. The idea behind 'watching' is definitely defensive rather than aggressive. In the same way as the gate keeper of a large house has to watch, to guard and protect, so should we in the last days (Mk. 13:34-37). Lk. 21:36 defines watching as praying always, concentrating our faith upon the fact that ultimately we will stand acceptably before the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment, and by His grace be saved from the great judgments which will surely come upon this world. The ideas of watching and praying often occur together (Lk. 21:36; Mk. 14:38; Mt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7). Prayer for our forgiveness, for acceptance by our Lord, must therefore characterize our watching in these last days. We must "watch" in the sense of being on our guard against the possibility of personal and communal apostasy from the faith (Acts 20:31); "watching" is standing fast in the doctrines of the one faith (1 Cor. 16:31), exhorting and encouraging others in the household of faith (1 Thess. 5:6,11), holding fast in ecclesias swamped by apathy and apostasy, strengthening what remains (Rev. 3:2,3; 2 Tim. 4:3-5), keeping the oil of the word burning in our lamps even though others have let it burn out (Mt. 25:13).

*21:37 And every day he was teaching in the temple, and every night he went and stayed on the mount that is called Olivet-* Perhaps He didn't wish to draw attention to the Bethany home. Or perhaps He found Gethsemane especially conducive to the prayer which filled His final nights. Maybe He wanted to reduce His journey time each day to the temple, in order to provide maximum teaching and final appeal to Israel. He must surely have had sympathizers within the city who would have let Him spend the night there. But He didn't wish to make them a target for the Jews, nor give them the appearance of some special blessing after all

the grief was over and He was glorified. He likely wanted to have the 12 with Him as much as possible, and it's unlikely such a large group could have been accommodated under one roof. And so they slept rough for those final nights, with Him using every moment in prayer, teaching and appeal.

*21:38 And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, to hear him-* The "early morning" eagerness for His teaching explains why He reduced His journey time to the temple each day by sleeping rough on Olivet rather than in Bethany (:37). Their attraction to His teaching was deep; for He carefully avoided doing miracles at this stage.

## CHAPTER 22

22:1 *Now the feast of unleavened bread drew near, which is called the Passover-* This clarification would have been unnecessary for a Jewish audience, so we can see that Luke was aiming at preaching to the Gentiles even before generally this was acceptable within the church. Taking the Gospel to those whom the main body of believers hold to be unacceptable is a lonely and visionary task.

22:2 *And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might put him to death, for they feared the people-* This 'seeking' to kill the Lord connects these orthodox Jews with Herod, who 'sought' to kill the Lord at His birth (s.w. Mt. 2:13,20). The seeking of the Jews to kill the Lord coincided with the seeking of Judas to betray Him to them (s.w. Mt. 26:16). In this sense the Jewish satan entered into Judas (:3). And the Lord was aware of all this; as noted on Mk. 14:1, He brought about the circumstances so that He died as the Passover lamb at that feast. He did so by provoking Judas to 'seek' to betray Him through the incident of the 'waste' of wealth at Bethany; when He knew that the Jews were also 'seeking' His death.

22:3 *And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve-* It was the Jewish 'satan' that put the idea of betraying Jesus into Judas' mind, so Lk. 22:2,3 implies: "the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him...then entered Satan into Judas". See on :2. The Jewish ideas of an immediate Kingdom and the throwing off of the Roman yoke by a glamorous, heroic Messiah entered Judas, and caused him to become so bitter against Christ's Messiahship that he betrayed Him. The Jewish Satan, in the form of both the Jews and their ideology, was at work on the other disciples too: "Satan has desired to have you" (plural), Jesus warned them. Especially was the High Priest seeking Peter: "I have prayed for you (Peter – singular), that your faith doesn't fail you" (Lk. 22:31,32). Could Jesus foresee the Satan – High Priest later arresting Peter and his subsequent trial in prison? Throughout the first century, the Jewish and Roman Devil sought "whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

Note how "enter" is used in a non-physical sense in Mt. 25:21: "Enter into the joy of your Lord", entering in at the narrow gate (Mt. 7:13), entering into another's labours (Jn. 4:38). 'Satan' enters a man's heart in the sense that "the lusts of other things enter in" (Mk. 4:19); in this sense we can "enter into temptation" (Lk. 22:46).

The link between Judas and the 'Devil' is brought out by a consideration of Luke's comment that Judas "sought an opportune time [*eukairan*] to betray Jesus" (Lk. 22:6). But Luke earlier used this word in Lk. 4:13 to describe how the "Devil" in the wilderness departed from the Lord "until

an opportune time" [*achri kairou*]. The Lord's victory in the wilderness prepared Him for the victory over the 'Devil' which He achieved in His final passion. Just as the temptation to 'come down from the cross' was a repetition of the temptation to throw Himself down from the temple. John's Gospel often repeats the history of the other Gospels, but in different language. In Mt. 26:46, the Lord comments upon the arrival of Judas: "Rise, let us be going; my betrayer is coming". But Jn. 14:30,31 puts it like this: "The prince of this world [a phrase understood as meaning 'the evil one', the Devil] is coming... Rise, let us be going". John is picking up the mythological language of the 'Satan' figure, and applying it to a real person with real attitudes and sinful intentions – i.e. Judas, who is presented as a personification of the 'Satan' / 'Devil' / 'Prince of this world' principle.

We can easily overlook the huge significance of Mk. 14:21 recording the Lord's words that Judas personally was guilty for betraying Him, and would suffer accordingly – even though Lk. 22:22 says that Judas did this because the Satan [i.e. the Jews] 'entered him'. *Whatever* that means, it doesn't mean that Judas nor anyone is thereby not personally responsible for their actions.

The translation of the Greek text in Jn. 13:2 has been problematic. "The Devil having put into the heart of Judas" doesn't quite do justice to what the Greek is really saying. The respected expositor and Greek student C.K. Barratt insists that strictly, the Greek means 'the Devil had put into his own [i.e. the Devil's] heart, that Judas should betray Jesus' (C.K. Barratt, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) p. 365. Barratt's view of the Greek is confirmed in D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981) p. 131). This translation is almost impossible to make any sense of given the orthodox understanding of the 'Devil'. And so most popular translations ignore the obvious difficulty by glossing over the strict meaning of the Greek. Understanding the 'Devil' as the innate source of temptation within the human heart, the picture becomes clearer. The idea is surely that the thought of betraying Jesus began within the Devil-mind of Judas; he 'put the thought in his own mind', as if to stress how Judas conceived this thought totally of himself and within his own mind, just as later Ananias and Sapphira [in an analogous incident] 'conceived this thing within their heart'. So properly translated, Jn. 13:2 actually supports our general thesis about the Devil – it is stressing that the heart of Judas was itself responsible, that heart put the idea of betraying Jesus into itself – and nobody else was responsible. Note how the Lord addresses Judas as if Judas had full responsibility for his actions and control over them – e.g. "What you are going to do, do quickly" (Jn. 13:27), and Mk. 14:21 "Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born". Those two passages alone surely make it clear that Judas was no robot,

no puppet on a satanic string. He had full responsibility and choice over his actions, hence these words of the Lord to him. Summing up, we are left with the question: Did *Judas* betray Jesus, or did *Satan*, working through Judas, betray Jesus? The answer, surely, is that it was Judas, and he must bear full responsibility for that.

*22:4 And he went away, and discussed with the chief priests and captains how he might betray him to them-* The Jews discussed amongst themselves how they might arrest and kill Jesus: "And they plotted together how they might seize Jesus using trickery and kill him" (Mt. 26:4). Again we see a parallel between the Jews and Judas; the Jewish 'satan' entered into him (:3).

*22:5 And they were glad, and agreed to give him money-* Matthew says they gave him 30 pieces of silver immediately, but this would have been a down payment for a future promise of money.

*22:6 And he consented-* This Greek word is usually translated "confessed", in the sense of repenting of sin. He may have assured them that He felt the Lord's movement was wrong and that he had been sinful to support it.

*And looked for an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of the crowd-* Perhaps this was why the Lord chose to spend His nights sleeping rough on Olivet rather than in the home at Bethany or of sympathizers in Jerusalem. He was giving Judas the chance to betray Him. If we look for an opportunity to sin, the Lord in a way provides it in that He can 'lead into temptation' unless we pray not to be so led.

*22:7 And the day of unleavened bread came, on which the Passover must be sacrificed-* The Lord was aware that the Passover sacrifice was Himself. He wanted to die when the lambs were killed. And He did. His psychological manipulation of it all went perfectly. We can read "the day" of unleavened bread as meaning "the time", rather than referring to a particular period of 24 hours.

*22:8 And he sent Peter and John on an errand, saying: Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover-* This is the language of the 'preparing' of the Marriage Supper (s.w. Mt. 22:4). And yet at that meal, He explained to them how in fact He had been sent by God on a mission to "prepare" a place in God's Kingdom for them, and this preparation required His death on the cross (Jn. 14:2,3). They would later have reflected that their journey and efforts to prepare were representative of His own work for them.

*22:9 And they asked him: Where do you want us to prepare for it?-* Perhaps we are intended to see a veiled allusion to Dt. 16:2, where we learn that the Passover was to be kept in the place which Yahweh chose.

And they are asking the Lord where He has chosen to eat the Passover. Whilst He was and is not God, He functions as God and manifested Him in flesh.

*22:10 And he said to them: When you enter into the city, there you shall meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him into the house to which he goes-* This water was carried upstairs into the upper room, and became, as it were, the wine of the new covenant. Carrying water was woman's work, and the Lord surely arranged this special sign in order to show how at His table, there was gender equality. He was so far ahead of His time. The vague "such a man" is perhaps to conceal the identity of the householder, given that the Gospels were distributed at a time of persecution. Or perhaps it was in order to avoid the identifying of the house and turning it into some kind of shrine, or special honour being given to the householder.

*22:11 And you shall say to the master of the house: The Teacher says to you-* The anonymous man, unnamed perhaps for security reasons, was presumably a believer for this title to mean anything to the man. Likewise the reference to the Lord's time being at hand (Mt.) would've only been understandable by a disciple. The Lord wishes to assume that the man will appreciate that if the Lord's time of death was at hand, then He must first keep the Passover.

*Where is the guest room, in which I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?-* The "guest room" is the same concept as in Jn. 14:2, where there in that very guest room which they had "prepared", the Lord says that He is now going to the cross to prepare *them* a room, an eternal place in the Father's house. He wished them to perceive a mutuality between them and Himself; what they had done, He was now going to do on a far greater scale. And to this day, we sense this mutuality between us and our Lord.

*22:12 And he will show you a large furnished upper room. There make ready-* Mk. 14:15 brings out the paradox more strongly. The room was "ready" and yet there they were to "prepare"; "prepare" translates the same Greek word as "ready". All was prepared; the Lord was the Passover lamb and had prepared Himself for an untimely death, just as they were to keep Passover in advance of the 14th Nissan. They were to show willingness to do their part, but they could not fully do it. It has been done for them already. And we get this impression in all our attempts at labour for the Lord.

*22:13 And they went and found as he had said to them, and they made ready the Passover-* As noted on :12, it was already "made ready", so they just did the cosmetic arrangements. We likewise can add nothing really to the Lord's sacrifice.

22:14 *And when the hour had arrived, he sat down with the apostles-* There is no actual mention of the slaying of the paschal lamb, which should have been done that evening. It had already been strangely provided for them. "Sat down" is "dining" in Matthew; the idea is of reclining.

Joachim Jeremias gives a whole string of quotes from Rabbinic and historical writings that indicate that "At the time of Jesus the diners sat down" to eat. Yet the Gospel records are insistent that Jesus and the disciples *reclined* at the last supper (Mt. 26:20; Mk. 14:18; Lk. 22:14; Jn. 13:12,23,25,28). Yet at the Passover, it was apparently common to recline, because as Rabbi Levi commented "slaves eat standing, but here at the Passover meal people should recline to eat, to signify that they have passed from slavery to freedom". The breaking of bread is thus stressed in the records as being a symbol of our freedom from slavery. It should not in that sense be a worrying experience, taking us on a guilt trip. It is to celebrate the salvation and release from bondage which has truly been achieved for us in Christ our Passover.

"With the apostles" doesn't mean that only the twelve partook or were present. There are reasons to think that there were others present too.

22:15 *And he said to them: I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer-* It was 'with desire that He desired' [a real emphasis] to eat the Passover with His men. He so wants us to break bread with Him; He so wants us to partake of and with Him. He abides in us and we in Him; see on Jn. 17:24.

22:16 *For I say to you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God-* The Lord told us that the Passover feast would "be fulfilled in (i.e. by?) the Kingdom of God". This is confirmed by the description of "the marriage supper of the lamb" in Rev. 19:9. Likewise the parable of Lk. 14 speaks of "a great supper" at the beginning of the Millennium. As we share this feast together now, we are acting out a parable of the feast to be kept at the Lord's return. In the light of this, how important it is to ensure that there is no bitterness and disunity at the breaking of bread meeting! To be invited to sit at the King's table is an honour indeed (cp. 2 Sam. 19:28). Remember that we are reaffirming our covenant. "This is the blood of the covenant" is a reference back to the blood of the Old Covenant being sprinkled upon the people, with their response of vowing obedience unto the end (Ex. 24:7). The solemnity of that distant moment should be ours, weekly.

22:17- see on Mk. 14:23.

*And he took a cup-* This was by no means easy for Him, because in Gethsemane He struggled so deeply in order to take it. Surely Luke was

aware of this and wishes us to remember it every time we break bread. He *did* take the cup- the cup we go on to read about, that was so difficult for Him to accept. Luke's record records the taking of the cup twice. This could be a reference to multiple cups of wine drunk at the Passover; or it could be that Luke simply records the incident twice. Or perhaps the Lord was simply drinking from the common table wine, and more than once drew out the symbology.

*And when he had given thanks-* Here *eucharisteo* is used, but *eulogeo* for the 'blessing' of the bread. The difference may be in that the Lord took the bread, an accessory to the meal, and turned that which was so ordinary into something of spiritual symbolism; and His blessing of the bread was necessary for this. But *eucharisteo* includes the idea of grace, *charis*, and suggests more thankfulness for grace- a thought appropriate to the meaning of the Lord's blood shed for us by grace. And naturally we wonder whether the wine that was taken was one of the Passover cups, or simply some of the table wine, an accessory to the meal just as the bread was. Whilst there was a taking of four cups of wine at the Passover, this may not be the only explanation for Luke recording the taking of two of them. It could simply be that as they were eating the Passover lamb, they ate bread and drank weak wine as part of the accompaniments which went with every Palestinian meal. And the Lord twice passed comment on the wine, that it represented His blood. This would be similar to the manner in which He chose the bread, the *artos*, the ordinary word for bread rather than one referring specifically to unleavened bread, as the symbol for His body- rather than the meat of the Passover lamb. He could have made use of the blood of the Passover lamb as a symbol in some way- e.g. He could have asked a servant to bring the blood of the lamb and asked the disciples to all dip their fingers in it. But instead He uses wine as a symbol of His blood. My hunch is that the wine was the ordinary table wine accompanying the meal, just as the bread was, and was not the ritually significant Passover cup. In any case, the tradition of drinking cups of wine at Passover was non-Biblical, and somehow out of keeping with the original spirit of Passover, which was to remember the haste with which the first Passover was eaten. 1 Cor. 10:16 speaks of "the cup of blessing which we bless", with the emphasis on the "we". We are to do what the Lord did that night- not be mere audience figures, but actually do what He did.

*He said: Take this and share it among yourselves-* "Among yourselves" carries the idea of 'among all of you'; Mt. "All of you, drink it". The appeal for all to drink it was surely said because some were doubtful as to whether they should take it. Perhaps there were others in the room apart from the twelve. But most likely this was yet another appeal to Judas- to drink the cup of salvation and forgiveness. He gave the reason in Mt. 26:28- "For", or because, this was the symbol of the means for the forgiveness of sins. The Lord's attitude to Judas leaves us realizing we

should never give up with the lost. Even the very worst of them. And given the Lord's eagerness that Judas break bread, we can hardly conclude that any sinner is thereby unworthy of participation at the breaking of bread. It is after all His table and not ours. This isn't to say that forms of discipline may not be required at times, but welcome at the Lord's table should never be withdrawn.

*22:18 For I say to you, I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine from this time forward-* An allusion to how the priest on duty was not to drink wine during his service. The Lord foresaw His work from then on, beginning with the cross, as an active doing of priestly work for us. This would imply that the essence of His work on the cross is the essence of His work for us today; there is a continuity between Him there and His work for us now, with elements of the same pain and passionate focus upon us and the achievement of our salvation. He is not waiting passively in Heaven for the time to return; He is actively busy for us. There is also the implication in His words that His future 'drinking' will be literal- He was holding literal wine in His hand, and He said He would not again drink it until the Kingdom. This suggests that at very least, He invites us to understand His future Messianic banquet as being in some ways a literal feast.

The Lord clearly taught the continuity between the breaking of bread and the future marriage supper by observing that He would not again drink the cup until He drinks it with us in the Kingdom. The parables of how the Gospel invites people as it were to a meal are suggesting that we should see the Kingdom as a meal, a supper, of which our memorial service is but a foretaste. We are commanded to enter the supper and take the lowest seat (Lk. 14:10), strongly aware that others are present more honourable than ourselves. Those with this spirit are simply never going to dream of telling another guest 'Leave! Don't partake of the meal!'. But this is the spirit of those who are exclusive and who use the Lord's table as a weapon in their hands to wage their petty church wars. The very early church didn't behave like this, but instead sought to incarnate and continue the pattern of the meals of the Lord Jesus during His ministry. And this is one major reason why their unity drew such attention, and they grew. To exclude someone from the Lord's table is to judge them as excluded from the Kingdom banquet. And those who make such judgment will themselves be rejected from it.

*Until the kingdom of God shall come-* The reference is primarily to the literal Kingdom to be established on earth at His return (Lk. 22:29,30 goes on to speak of the disciples eating and drinking in the Kingdom as they sit with Christ on His throne judging Israel), but there is a sense in which His word is fulfilled in the breaking of bread service, where He drinks wine with us as the invisible guest. For His parables of the Kingdom all speak of the experience of God's reign / Kingship as a present experience in the lives of His people. Lk. 22:16 adds with reference to the

bread: "Until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God". The fulfilment of Passover deliverance is finally in the last day, and yet the fulfilment of Passover is also to be seen in the breaking of bread service. Note in passing that the Lord's predilection for the term 'Kingdom of God' or 'Father's Kingdom' was perhaps to counterbalance the Jewish emphasis upon the Kingdom as being that of *our* father *David* (Mk. 11:10). The Kingdom was God's, "*Yours* is the Kingdom", rather than simply and solely the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom.

22:19 *And he took bread*- Taking bread, blessing and breaking it and giving to the disciples was exactly what the Lord did at the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 (14:19; 15:36), and we are thereby justified in seeing what He did then as having a religious dimension, practicing thereby an extremely open table. To 'take bread' can mean [although not always] to actually eat bread. Consider: "The disciples had forgotten to take bread, *neither* did they have with them more than one loaf" (Mk. 8:14)- the force of "*neither...*" is that they had not eaten bread, rather than that they had forgotten to bring any with them. Philip complained that there would not be enough bread for each of the crowd to 'take' even a little, i.e. to eat just a little (Jn. 6:7). So it could be that the Lord took and ate bread, blessed it, and then asked the disciples to eat it. This sequence of events would then make the eating of bread a more conscious doing of what Jesus had done. He took the bread, and then He asks them to take the bread ("Take, eat"). He is inviting them to mimic Him.

*And when he had given thanks*- It was usual to bless a meal, especially the Passover lamb, but here the Lord offers a special prayer for the accessory to the meal, the side dish of bread. He wanted to highlight the significance of the most ordinary thing on the table and show that it represented Him.

*He broke it*- Not referring to any breaking of His body, for not a bone of Him was broken, but rather to the sharing of every part of Himself with us all; one aspect of Him to this one, another to that one.

*And gave it to them*- The use of *didomi* is set in the context of all the talk about how the Lord would be *para-didomi*, betrayed / handed / given over to the Jews. The idea is that what happened was ultimately the Lord's choice. He gave Himself, to God and to His people, rather than being given over to death against His will. The giving of the bread to them was symbolic of how He would give His body to crucifixion, and how the 'giving over' of Jesus by Judas was not something outside of the Lord's control. It was not a misfortune which changed plans, rather was it precisely in line with the Lord's own giving of His body.

*Saying: This is my body which is given for you*- He said "This is My body which is given for you" (Lk. 22:29), and also "This is My body which is broken for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). He surely said both, repeating the words

as the disciples ate the bread. He chose bread and not lamb to represent His body because He wished to emphasize His ordinariness and thereby His presence in the human, daily things of life. To give ones' body is a very intimate statement, almost to the point of being sexual. This is the sober intensity and extent to which the Lord gave Himself for us.

When Jesus said "this is My body" we are to understand that 'this *represents*, this is [a symbol of] my body'. Jesus was clearly referring to what was usually said at the Passover: "This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt". It wasn't of course literally the same bread. "This is" clearly means 'this represents' in Zech. 5:3,8; Mt. 13:19-23,38; 1 Cor. 11:25; 12:27. In some Bible versions, when we read the word 'means', it is simply a translation of the verb 'to be' (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; Lk. 15:26; Acts 2:12). 'This is' should be read as 'this means / this represents'. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out here in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean.

*Do this in remembrance of me-* By inviting the disciples to share His cup and His baptism, He was offering them there and then a part in the life of self-crucifixion, which found its natural and final articulation in the death of the cross. He deftly poured out the wine as a symbol that His life was even then being poured out (Lk. 22:19).

The breaking of bread is intended as a special gift to us. Let it have its intended power. "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19) is an inadequate translation of the Greek text – "the words do not indicate a mere memorial meal in memory of a man now dead, but strictly mean "making present reality" of Christ's saving death". So let the bread and wine truly be an *aide memoire*. That on a Friday afternoon, on a day in April, on a hill outside Jerusalem, around 2000 years ago, Jesus died for me. Three days later, a man dressed as a working man, a humble gardener, walked out of a tomb, perhaps folded His grave clothes first, and saw the lights of early morning Jerusalem twinkling in the distance. And 40 days later ascended through cotton wool clouds and blue sky, with the necks and throats of watching disciples moving backwards as they gaped at the sight; and will just as surely come again, to take you and me unto Himself. These things, and the endless implications of them, are what will fill our minds if they impress us as having really happened. If we believe the Bible is inspired, it will have the result of what Harry Whittaker called "Bible television"; we will see these things as if they happened before our eyes.

22:20- see on Mk. 14:23.

*And the cup in like manner after supper, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood-* The promises to Abraham were effectively the new

covenant, even though they were given before the old covenant [the law of Moses] was given. The Lord's death confirmed those promises made to the Jewish fathers (Rom. 15:8). But God's word is true as it stands and in that sense needs no confirmation, no guarantee of truthfulness. But in an effort to persuade us of the simple truth and reality of the promises of eternity in the Kingdom which were made to Abraham, God confirmed it through the death of His Son. This was foreseen in the horror of great darkness which Abraham experienced in Genesis 15. Abraham did nothing to confirm his side of the covenant; it was God who passed between the pieces of the slain animal, during a time of Divine darkness as there was on the cross, in order to demonstrate to Abraham and to us all how serious He was about keeping His promise. Through the death of Christ, God commended His love to us (Rom. 5:8), He confirmed the covenant; not that He needed to do so, nor that His love needs any more commendation to us. But He did, in order to seek to persuade us of the truth of the promises which comprise the Gospel (Gal. 3:8). In this sense "the promise was made sure [s.w. 'confirmed'] to all the seed" (Rom. 4:16); the extra element of making sure or confirming the promise was in the death of God's Son. Our hope is therefore "sure *and* confirmed [AV "steadfast"]" (Heb. 6:19). Heb. 9:17 puts it another way in saying that a will or legacy is only confirmed [AV "of force"] by the death of the one who promised the inheritance, and the death of Christ was God's way of confirming the truth of what He had promised. This same word meaning 'confirmed' is used by Peter in writing of how we have "the word of prophecy made sure / confirmed" (2 Pet. 1:19). The prophesied word is the word of the Gospel, the promise of the Kingdom which began in Genesis, and this has been confirmed to us, made even more sure, by the Lord's death. Peter isn't referring to prophecy in the sense of future events being predicted in the arena of world geopolitics; the prophesied word is the word of our salvation, of the Gospel- which is how Peter elsewhere uses the idea of "the word". God can save who He wishes, as, how and when He wishes. He was not somehow duty bound, left with no option, forced by an unpleasant logical bind to suffer the death of His Son. He gave His Son, according to His own plan from the beginning. But He did it that way in order to persuade us of His love and simple desire to give us the Kingdom He has promised from the beginning of His revelation to men. The Lord's blood is "of the new covenant" not in that it *is itself* the new covenant, but rather in that it is the blood associated with the confirmation of that covenant as true. And so it is understandable that the Lord should wish us to understand His blood as the blood of the new covenant, the supreme sign that it is for real, and desire us to regularly take that cup which reminds us of these things. Heb. 6:17,18 carries the same idea- that in order to demonstrate the utter certainty of the things promised to Abraham's seed, God confirmed it by an oath so that we might have a strong consolation and persuasion of the certainty of the promise. The death of God's Son was not therefore unavoidable for Him; He could save us as He wishes. But He chose this

most painful way in the ultimate attempt to persuade men of the reality of His Son. With this understanding we can better appreciate the tales of the old missionaries who went to pagan and illiterate tribes and reported a strange response to their message once they explained the idea of the Son of God dying on a cross to show us God's love. It must be persuasive to us too, week by week as we reflect on the blood of the covenant.

"Covenant" literally means that which is to be disposed of or distributed, and was used about the distribution of property upon decease. The Lord's parables about the Master who distributes all His wealth and possessions to His servants were surely looking forward to His death, at which He gave us all He had- and that was and is visually symbolized in the breaking of bread, the division even of His body and life blood amongst us, for us to trade with.

Moses bound the people into covenant relationship with the words: "Behold the blood of the covenant" (Ex. 24:8). These very words were used by the Lord in introducing the emblems of the breaking of bread (Mk. 14:24). This is how important it is. We are showing that we are the covenant, special Israel of God amidst a Gentile world. Indeed, "the blood of the covenant" in later Judaism came to refer to the blood of circumcision (cp. Gen. 17:10) and it could be that the Lord was seeking to draw a comparison between circumcision and the breaking of bread. For this is how His words would have sounded in the ears of His initial hearers. This is how vital and defining it is to partake of it.

*Which is poured out for you-* He perhaps followed this by saying "Shed for you" (Lk. 22:20). This is often the way with Biblical statements- the general and global is stated, and then the scale is focused down to you personally. His blood was shed for many... but for you. However we may also have here a similar idea to that expressed in the parable of the man [Christ] who finds treasure [us] in the field of the world, and therefore gives all in order to redeem the field, in order to get us as His own (13:44). Likewise His blood was shed for many, the redemption price was paid for humanity, that He might redeem us. Putting Lk. 22:20 and Mt. 26:28 together, the Lord may have said: "... My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins of you / for the remission of *your* sins". One wonders whether the Lord actually was pouring out the wine as He spoke the word "shed". The same word for "shed" is used of how the new wine put into old bottles "runs out". The idea may be that if we don't change, then we crucify Christ afresh. But the Lord may also have in mind that if Israel had accepted the wine of the new covenant which He preached, then the shedding of His blood could have been avoidable. The fact it could have been avoidable- for Israel didn't *have* to crucify their King- doesn't mean that God was not behind it, using it to confirm the covenant with us, nor that Christ did not of Himself give His own life.

"Poured out" is ongoing, Gk. 'is being shed', another hint at the ongoing nature of His death.

22:21 *But behold, the hand of him that betrays me is with me at this table-* To be together at table meant to be in fellowship and mutual acceptance of each other; one ought to trust those with whom he sat at table. This was the huge significance of the Lord's open table policy, dining with questionable and unholy characters, thereby overturning all the religious hang-ups about guilt by association.

22:22 *For the Son of Man indeed goes-* The Lord's 'going' was His going to the cross. The Lord used the same word in Mt. 13:44 in describing Himself as the man who 'goes' *with joy* and sells all that He has in order to buy / redeem [s.w.] the field (representing the world) in order to gain for Himself the treasure (the redeemed). His 'going' to the cross was therefore done with some form of "joy". Even when the only visible representative of the treasure were that band of mixed up men and a few doubtful women. He uses the word again in telling Peter to 'go' behind Him and carry His cross (Mt. 16:23). Yet the Lord looked beyond the cross; He saw Himself as 'going' to the Father (Jn. 7:33; 8:14,21,22 s.w.), in the same way as we do not only 'go' to our death, but ultimately even death itself is part of an onward journey ultimately towards God and His Kingdom. The Lord's attitude to His death was that He *knew* that He was now 'going to the Father' (Jn. 13:3; 14:28; 16:5,10,16,17 s.w.). This unique perspective upon death and suffering is only logical for those who have a clear conception of future resurrection and personal fellowship with the Father in His future Kingdom.

*As it has been determined-* Mt. "as it is written".

*But woe to that man through whom he is betrayed!-* The Lord typically pronounced 'Woe' upon the Jewish world and their religious leaders. He classes Judas along with them, because his actions had been inspired by them. The devil, in this context referring to the Jewish opposition to Jesus, had put the idea of betrayal into the heart of Judas (Jn. 13:2). "Woe" translates *ouai*, an intensified form of *ou*, "no". Perhaps in His word choice the Lord was still desperately saying to Judas 'No! No! Don't do it!'. He knew that He had to be betrayed, but His appeals for Judas to repent were therefore rooted in an understanding that the Bible prophecies would come true in some other way than through Judas. For otherwise, Judas would have had no real possibility of repentance, and no real choice but than to do what he did.

22:23 *And they began to question among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing-* "Is it I, Lord?" lead to them asking each other rather than being satisfied with the Lord's cryptic response. Perhaps "every one of them" excludes Judas, because he apparently asked the question later, and replaces 'Lord' with "Master"[Gk. 'rabbi'] when he

asks: "Master ['rabbi'], is it I?" (Mt. 26:25). His usage of 'rabbi' to address the Lord may reflect how influenced he was by Judaism, and how he failed to appreciate the utter Lordship of Jesus. Judas maybe persuaded himself that this Jesus was just another itinerant rabbi, who Judaism would be better off without. Note that "Is it I?" is *eimi ego*, literally 'Am I?'. This is one of many examples of where *ego eimi* means simply 'I am', and [contrary to Trinitarian claims] the words do not mean that the speaker of them is claiming to be God.

*22:24 And there arose also a dispute among them, as to which of them would be counted as greatest-* Even after the acted parable of the feet washing, there was still a strife amongst them about who should be greatest. They'd clearly not grasped the Lord's teaching and example about not worrying about what place we take at a dinner. It could be that they accepted the Lord's upcoming death, and were wondering which of them ought to replace Him. They had thereby clearly missed His teaching in Jn. 14-16, that although He was going away, He was coming again and would permanently be with them as Lord, master and leader through the gift of the Spirit.

*22:25 And he said to them: The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them, and they that have authority over them are called Benefactors-* We must be aware that in helping people, be it in teaching them the Truth of Christ, or in materially supporting them in their needs, we must never allow our position of 'superiority' become a vehicle for abusing their person, however unintentionally. The Lord in Lk. 22:25 spoke of how in the world, "benefactors" have power over people. His idea seems to have been: 'If you show generosity in the world, you have authority over others; but you, after my example, must show generosity to others in humble acts of service but not expect authority over others as a result of this'. The giving of help or welfare in any form should therefore never become a source of control over another person. Their integrity and independence as a person must never be in this sense 'abused' by us or simply lost sight of, because we have helped them. Peter took due note of this teaching, repeating it in 1 Pet. 5:3.

*22:26 But you shall not be so, but he that is the elder among you, let him become as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that does serve-* Again, these words remained in Peter's mind and he faithfully teaches them to his converts in his letters. Perhaps Peter was especially sensitive to these words (see on :25) because he was the eldest among the group, and also the one who had been given a chief role at various times in the ministry. The Lord's words here were specifically directed at him.

The Lord was addressed as 'Rabbi' and to some extent acted like one. It was the well known duty of a rabbi's pupils to serve their teacher and do menial chores for him; the Jewish writings of the time and the Mishnah are full of references to this. Yet the Lord treated His 'servants' radically

differently- His behaviour at the Last Supper was just the opposite. And He even taught that He, the Lord of all, would be so happy that His servants were waiting for Him that He would "come forth and serve them" (Lk. 12:37). He was a most unusual "Lord and Master", one who served His servants, and whose death for them was His ultimate act of service.

*22:27 For which is greater, he that sits at the table, or he that serves? Is not he that sits at the table? But among you, I am he that serves-* The parallel record in Jn. 13:4-17 describes the Lord actually serving as a servant, when He was the greatest. This was John's way of showing how the word [in this case, the Lord's own words as recorded here by Luke] became flesh in Him.

*22:28 But you are those who have stayed with me in my time of trial-* The disciples' persistent failure to grasp our Lord's teaching must have been a great source of trial and frustration for Him. Despite His warnings about His coming sufferings, the disciples failed to comprehend this; perhaps partly due to Jesus Himself fluctuating between talking of his death in both literal and then figurative terms. In His time of greatest need of encouragement He found them sadly lacking in any real degree of spirituality beyond a fanatic allegiance to Him. And yet He graciously thanked them for continuing with Him in His temptations, even though they fell asleep. We can under-estimate how sensitive He is to our feeble spirituality, and how even the basic will to be loyal, no matter how much we fail in practice, means so much to Him. Yet their lack of comprehension must have been especially tragic, since one of the reasons for the gift of the disciples was to help Jesus through the pain of His ministry, and this was to culminate in the cross. After the Jews' first council of war against Christ, He prayed for strength and was answered by being given the twelve (Lk. 6:11-13).

The disciples slept in Gethsemane, despite being asked to stay awake and encourage the Lord in His hour of need (Lk. 22:45). Yet He thanks them for being those who continued with them in His temptations. When the Jews agreed at a council to kill Him, the Lord went to be alone with the twelve (Jn. 11:53,54). He took such comfort from them even though they did not or would not understand the reality of His upcoming death. He, like us, could only take such comfort from His brethren if He viewed them positively.

*22:29 And I appoint to you a kingdom, even as my Father appointed me-* The Greek for "appoint" is always elsewhere used about a covenant. They had just celebrated the new covenant in the Lord's blood. Participation in that new covenant meant that for sure, a Kingdom had been covenanted to them. The cup of the covenant speaks the same assurance to us today. All that is true of the Son becomes true for all those in Him. As He has been covenanted a Kingdom, so have we. The certainty of the Kingdom

for Him is as sure as it is for we who are in Him. This takes some believing, but it is all part of our status "in Christ".

22:30 *So that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you shall sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel-* This is an allusion to the happiness of Solomon's servants as they sat down to food and wine; they listened to Solomon's wisdom as they ate. Lk. 14:15 speaks of us as happy servants. The idea is that the eating and drinking at the Lord's Passover table was to be repeated in the Kingdom to come. Joseph celebrated his brothers' repentance with a meal together, at which they sat in their proper places (Gen. 43:16). Likewise at the marriage supper of the lamb, with each in his proper place (Lk. 14:10; 22:30; Rev. 19:9).

It was apparent that in the breaking of bread meetings, there had to be a host. The host was a vital figure. And yet herein lay the huge significance of breaking of bread meetings being held in homes- presumably the home of a richer believer- and yet it was the table *of the Lord*. *He* and not the master of the house was the host of that meeting. It's for this reason that it was unthinkable for any invited by grace to their Lord's table to turn away other guests- for it wasn't *their* table, it was the table of another One, and they were but guests. Attempts to bar others from the Lord's table in our own time are equally rude and deeply lacking in basic spiritual understanding. There are evident similarities between the breaking of bread experience and the marriage supper which we shall eat with the Lord Jesus in His Kingdom. The breaking of bread assembly is called "the table of the Lord"- and yet He says that we shall eat at "My table" at His return.

22:31 *And the Lord said: Simon, Simon, Satan has asked for you that he might sift you as wheat-* The fact an Angel was called 'satan' in Num. 22 and in Job's case means we can maybe have another look at Luke 22:31, where Jesus tells the disciples "satan has desired to have you (lit. 'demanded you for trial') that he may sift you as wheat". Wheat is normally a symbol of the righteous after a process of tribulation or judgement. The satan here could be an Angel, demanding them for trial from God, as Job's satan Angel did. The Lord's comment that satan had demanded to have the disciples, especially Peter is clearly based upon the experience of Job, whom satan also demanded. The Lord saw a similarity between Job and Peter, in that Job's sufferings were to be repeated in their essence in the experience of Peter. Only through that bitter weeping and reflection upon it, corresponding in the Lord's analogy to all that Job went through, would Peter like Job emerge triumphant. The Old Testament prophecies also give insight into the actual process of the betrayal. The Hebrew for "equal" in "a man my equal" (Ps. 55:13) is invariably translated elsewhere as 'price' or 'estimation'; possibly implying

that the Jews had set the same price on Judas' head (in the sense of a bribe offered to them) at one stage as they had on Jesus. The Jewish Satan seeking Peter and the other disciples ("Simon, Satan has desired to have you", plural) implies an organized attempt to subvert each of the twelve, perhaps by offering a financial reward for becoming a secret agent for the Jews. Judas having an equal price in the Jews' eyes as Jesus indicates how highly he was seen to rank among the disciples in the public eye- as important to the Jews as Jesus himself. This further strengthens the impression that Judas was highly esteemed by both Christ and the other disciples. It would appear that the love of this money was a significant factor in Judas' downfall; in the same way as Joseph's brethren were blinded by a money motive in betraying him rather than being interested in his death for its own sake. In addition, Judas' motives seem to have also been from being influenced by the thinking of the Jewish Satan, offering the chance of an immediate Kingdom. He is alluded to in 1 Jn. 2:19 (cp. Jn. 13:30) as the prototype of all who left the true faith to be influenced by Judaist doctrine. See on 1 Pet. 5:8.

It is noteworthy that the Lord had previously warned that the Jewish Satan / world would be actively trying to influence the disciples to stumble: "Woe unto the world (often referring to the Jewish world in the Gospels) because of the offences!... but woe to that man by whom the offence comes!... whoso shall offend one of these little ones (the disciples - Zech. 13:7 cp. Mt. 26:31) which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned" (Mt. 18:6,7). This invites comparison with "Woe unto that man by whom the son of man is betrayed... it had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Mt. 26:24). Notice that this stumbling of the disciples at the hand of the Jewish world and its servant Judas was to be around the time of Christ's capture (Mt. 26:31); which is what Luke 22:31 is warning the disciples ("you" plural) about, and which proved to be so relevant to Peter in the hours after the Lord's capture. Further proof that "the world" that was to cause these offences was the Jewish world is found by comparing Mt. 13:38,41. It's also been pointed out that 'Satan desires to sift you as wheat' "is a proverbial expression" (H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 312). Schleiermacher therefore observes about this passage: "There is no intention to teach anything with regard to Satan or to confirm that older belief" (F.E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: Clark, 1999 ed.) p. 165).

There's also some evident allusion back to the record of Job in the Septuagint version. "The Lord said to the Devil, 'Behold I give him over [*paradidonai*] to you; only preserve his life" (Job 2:6 LXX). *Paradidonai* and related words are very frequently used of how the Lord Jesus was 'handed over' to the systems of the Roman and Jewish Satan (e.g. Mk. 14:41), and yet ultimately His life was preserved by God. Here in Lk. 22:31 we have the Jewish Satan desiring to have the disciples, just as

Job's 'Satan' desired. If the disciples grasped the allusion, they would perceive that they were to be as Job, and believe that ultimately the 'Satan' was under God's control, and through prayerful endurance they would come to victory as Job did.

22:32- see on Mt. 16:18; Lk. 22:3; Acts 3:19; 8:24; 2 Cor. 13:7; 2 Pet. 1:12.

*But I prayed for you, that your faith should not fail-* Not only did the Lord pray that Peter's faith wouldn't fail. He repeatedly made the point in the lead up to Peter's temptations that His disciples really *did* know Him, therefore they should never deny this (Jn. 14:7,17; 15:21; 17:3), and He taught them that all men *must* know they were His disciples, if they truly were (Jn. 13:35). He was trying to strengthen Peter against the trial He knew would come: to deny that he knew Him. Likewise we may try to strengthen those prone to specific temptation, but the power of it depends on their recognition of their own weakness, and whether they have ears to hear. It would seem Peter didn't, so confident was he of his own strength. Moses of his own freewill chose to intercede for Israel, concerning things which at the time they knew nothing about; things which were almost against their will, in fact. And this is the prototype of the Lord's mediation for us who know not what to pray for as we ought. Consider how he prayed for Peter when Peter didn't realize he was being prayed for.

*And when you have been converted, strengthen your brothers-* Paul referred to the Jews to whom he preached as his "brothers" (Acts 13:26), and it may be that Peter at least initially understood his commission to "strengthen your brothers" as meaning preaching to his unbelieving Jewish brethren (although the same Greek word is used by Peter regarding his work of upbuilding the converts, 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:12). Gal. 2:8-10 informs us that Peter had a ministry to the Jews of the diaspora in the Roman empire just as much as Paul did to the Gentiles living in the same area (Gal. 2:8-10). Because the Acts record focuses more on Paul's work rather than Peter's doesn't mean that Peter was inactive. 1 Peter is addressed to Jewish converts living in the provinces of Asia Minor, and we can assume that Peter had spent years travelling around building up groups of believers based around the families of the individual Jews he had converted in Jerusalem at Pentecost. It would seem from 1 Cor. 1:12 that Peter had made a number of converts in Corinth, and 1 Pet. 5:13 strongly suggests Peter lived for a while in "Babylon" and had begun an ecclesia there. Whether this be taken as a code name for Rome or as literal Babylon (where there was a sizeable Jewish community), this was somewhere else Peter reached. All through this remarkable life of witness, he was motivated by his own experience of the Lord's greatness, and His all sufficient grace toward him in his

weakness. And a similar life of powerful witness lies before any who are touched likewise.

The command to strengthen brothers is given again in the Lord's interview with Peter in Jn. 21. Three times He asks him: 'do you love me?', and three times he invites Peter to care for the lambs and sheep- to strengthen his brethren. The triple denial and the triple re-instatement and triple confession of love both occurred by a fire, a *charcoal* fire on each occasion (Jn. 18:18; 21:9) just to heighten the evident connection. Peter's conversion can therefore be equated with his response to the denials- the repentance, the realization of his own frailty, and desperate acceptance of the Lord's gracious pardon. Yet Peter invites his fellow elders: "feed the flock of God", repeating the Lord's commission to him, as if he saw in himself a pattern for each man who would take any pastoral role in Christ's ecclesia. The implication is that each man must go through a like conversion. And Peter points out that we are "a royal priesthood", as if he saw each believer as a priest / pastor. Peter is our example. We all deny our Lord, camouflage it and justify it as we may. We all stand in Peter's uncomfortable shoes. We do in principle what Judas did.

"When you are converted..." elicits the obvious response that Peter was converted already! The Lord had spoken of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples (including Peter) had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But He also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). Quite simply, there are different levels of conversion. Baptism isn't conversion: it's a beginning, not an end.

22:33 *And he said to him: Lord, with you I am ready to go both to prison and to death-* Peter imagined himself going to prison and death "with you", walking alongside the Lord. But the reality of prison and death is that these things are faced alone. Walking with the Lord on the water, Peter could do it. But not alone. His impetuosity is indeed noticeable, but this should not make us unimpressed by his genuine level of dedication to his Lord. Peter did indeed go to prison and death with his Lord, but he was not then "ready" for that. That process of preparation was still ongoing.

22:34 *And he said: I tell you Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, until you shall deny three times that you know me-* Peter's problem with the cross was perhaps at the root of his denials of the Lord. Before the cock crowed twice, he denied Jesus twice (Lk. 22:34). It's been pointed out that chickens couldn't have been anywhere near the High Priest's house because the priests forbade anyone in Jerusalem from keeping chickens, lest they stray into the temple. The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* points out that the priest who was the temple crier was called the *Gaver*, Hebrew for

'cock' or 'rooster'. This man opened the temple before dawn and called the priests and people to make the morning sacrifice. And he did this two or three times. Surely the Lord was referring to this when He spoke of the 'cock' crowing. Each time, Peter was being called to make the sacrifice with Jesus; but instead he denied knowledge of Jesus and the call to the cross which that knowledge entails. The context of the Lord's warnings to Peter about his forthcoming denial was that Peter had insisted he *would* die with Jesus, sharing in His sacrifice. And the Lord was foretelling that when that call came, Peter would deny the knowledge of Jesus.

*22:35 And he said to them: When I sent you out without purse and wallet and shoes, did you lack anything? And they said: Nothing-* We are to realistically grasp the fact that His mission and ministry is in fact ours. And the total insecurity, exposure to danger, misunderstanding, slander, sudden calls of God to change direction and move way out of our comfort zone etc. are all part of participating in the short term fate and eternal victory of the One whom we follow. His call to each of us to preach Him is radical. He sent out His preachers with *no* money, *no* food etc. He didn't tell them to go out without *extra* money, *extra* food nor clothes etc. He instead told them to take *none* of these things. Why? Surely because He wanted them – and us- to understand that the preacher of Christ is to be *totally* dependent upon His provision for them. It was a high challenge. When the disciples faltered at the Last Supper, the Lord told them that OK, if you have a purse, take it; if you want a sword for protection, then buy one. Surely He was saying, as He is to us today: 'OK, I want you to rise up to the spirit of My 'Let the dead bury their dead' and 'Take no money with you' exhortations. But if you can't, OK, take a lower level, but all the same, go forth and be My witnesses. *Please!*'.

*22:36 And he said to them: But now, he that has a purse, let him take it, and likewise a wallet, and he that has none, let him sell his cloak and buy a sword-* As noted on :35, the Lord could be saying that He had intended them to learn from their experience when sent out on the preaching tour by Him; but they had not. He clearly didn't intended them to take Him literally, because there and then they had no chance to go buy swords. And then Peter pulled out a dagger the Lord tells him that that is quite enough. I take this verse as a lament that they had not retained the lessons learnt; for the Lord foresaw how they were going to all dramatically fail in Gethsemane and the subsequent events.

*22:37 For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: And he was numbered with the transgressors-* The Lord was reckoned "with" sinners, but not as a sinner. And therefore there was no point in the disciples fighting to stop Him being numbered with the transgressors. The prophecy had its specific fulfilment at the crucifixion (Mk. 15:28).

*For what is written about me must have its fulfilment-* "Fulfilment" is not the best translation. AV "have an end" struggles towards expressing the idea of "to be finally settled" (Vine). We may have here another insight into the open nature of prophecy. The exact outcome and nature of events was variable to some extent; it depended to what extent the Lord wished to fulfil them. The prophecies came to be "finally settled"; and were then "fulfilled in me".

*22:38 And they said: Lord, look, here are two swords. And he said to them: That is quite enough-* Again their literalism reflects a lack of faith and understanding. He is telling them that there is no point in fighting, because He must be crucified in the spirit of Isaiah 53. As noted on :35 and :36, He was lamenting that they had not learnt the lesson, that no sword or wallet was necessary. He dismisses any attempt to use those swords by saying "That is quite enough".

*22:39 And he came out and went, as his custom was, to the mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him-* His custom for the last few nights of His life was to sleep there on Olivet; because He knew that Judas was wanting an opportunity to betray Him out of sight of the crowds. In the middle of the night in Gethsemane would be ideal; and the Lord set up this situation.

*22:40 And when he came to the place, he said to them: So that you do not enter into temptation, pray-* "The place" may refer to Gethsemane, where He often went (Jn. 18:2). But the language is reminiscent of Abraham and Isaac coming "to the place" of sacrifice. It was as if He saw that spot in Gethsemane as His place of death. Perhaps He did hope that a ram would as it were be provided; for He did pray there for the cup to pass from Him. It is a mark of His supremacy as a spiritual man that He was not solely focused upon Himself, but instead was concerned about the spiritual pressure on His men.

The relationship between prayer and temptation may not simply be that the Holy Spirit will be provided to fortify us against temptation if we pray. If we are in prayer, in the Father's presence, then we are less likely to just give in to temptation. However, the connection between prayer and strength against temptation is proof enough that Bible reading is not the only strength against temptation. So much more help and succour of the Holy Spirit is available (Heb. 4:15,16).

*22:41 And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw away, and knelt down and prayed-* "A stone's throw" is an allusion to David and Goliath near the brook.

Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39);

as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being "buffeted" by Satan's servants, using the very word used of the Lord being "buffeted" straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

To fall on the face is used in the Old Testament to describe men like Abraham and Moses falling on their face in the visible presence of God, e.g. before an Angel (Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:4; 22:31). Yet there was no visible manifestation of God's presence at this time; so we are to assume that the Lord Jesus intensely perceived the Father's presence even though there was no visible sign of it. It could be that the Angel from Heaven strengthening the Lord had already appeared, but this appears to come *after* the Lord had fallen on His face.

The Lord had foreseen how He must be like the grain of the wheat (note the articles in the Greek) which must fall to the ground and die, and then arise in a glorious harvest (Jn. 12:24). But soon after saying that, the Lord fell to the ground (same Greek words) in prayer and asked the Father if the cup might pass from Him (Mk. 14:35). It seems to me that He fell to the ground in full reference to His earlier words, and asked desperately if this might be accepted as the falling to the earth of the grain of the wheat, i.e. Himself, which was vital for the harvest of the world. Don't under-estimate the amount of internal debate which the Lord would have had about these matters. The spirit of Christ in the prophets testified Messiah's sufferings "unto Christ" (1 Pet. 1:11 RVmg.), but He still had to figure it all out. And this enabled an element of doubt, even though in the end He knew "all the things that were coming upon him" (Jn. 18:4). To doubt is not to sin. Another Messianic Psalm had foretold: "In the multitude of my doubts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:19 RVmg.). This aspect heightens the agony of His final crisis, when He unexpectedly felt forsaken.

22:42 *Saying: Father, if You be willing, remove this cup from me-* This may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it-* some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross.

"Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest

possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the courage (and we sense her reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "even to the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden.

The Lord had taught more than once that "with God all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26; Mk. 9:23), and yet He inserts here a condition: "If it be possible". He recognized that God's plan was possible of fulfilment by any means, and yet He recognized that there was a condition to that. This issue is not really resolvable, at least not by any intellectual process. If, or rather when, we struggle with these issues, this balance between God's ultimate possibility and the fact there appear to be terms and conditions attached- then we are there with the Lord in Gethsemane. But we need to note that it was God who was being pushed to the limit here as well- for literally all things are indeed possible to Him, and He could have saved the world any way He wished. In His allowing of this chosen method we see the degree to which the cross was indeed His plan that He so wanted to see worked out.

"Let this cup pass" is interpreted in Mk. 14:35 as "That the hour might pass". He saw the cup and His "hour" of death as the same thing. The challenging thing is that He invites us to drink His cup, to share in His final hour... even when He Himself found this so hard to drink.

Paul uses the same Greek term "from me" in describing how also three times he asked for the thorn in the flesh to "depart *from me*" (2 Cor. 12:8). He saw his prayers and desires as a sharing in the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane, just as we can too.

*Nevertheless*- The saying of these brief words lasted long enough for the disciples to fall asleep. "Could you not watch with Me for one hour?" (Mt. 26:40) suggests not 'even just for one hour' but rather 'We've been here an hour, and you couldn't watch with me even for that short period of time'. So it took the Lord an hour to say the words recorded here, which can be spoken in a few seconds. We have a window here into the essence of prayer; the words can be spoken quickly, but saying with meaning can take far longer. There may well have been many minutes in between each

word here. And doubtless He said the same words and repeated the ideas several times, which would explain the slight differences in wording at this point between the Gospel records.

*Let not my will, but Yours be done-* Trinitarians need to note that the Lord's will was not totally the same as that of His Father.

*22:43 And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him-* See on Ps. 80:15. The son of man was "made strong" by the Father through Angelic ministrations, as happened after the wilderness temptations. The strengthening may have been in order to pray to the Father "more earnestly" in :44. "Strengthening" is *enischuo*, literally, to in-strengthen, to in-possible. The same word *ischuo* is used in the Lord's lament that at this time, Peter, James and John "could" not watch in prayer (Mt. 26:40). They were not 'strong' because they had not allowed themselves to be 'strengthened'. To not make use of empowerment is therefore sinful. We have huge potential power available to us through the Holy Spirit, the direct succour of the Lord in our hearts (Heb. 4:15,16). To claim that this is not available is a serious false teaching.

*22:44 And being in anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground-* The mental intensity within His mind had physiological effects. His skin became thin and the sweat dropped as blobs. Only Luke the doctor notes this. This was the focus of a human mind upon God such as has never been seen. The shame is that the Lord's men drifted off to sleep whilst He was achieving it. What was He praying for? Perhaps there were no requests as such, but a mind locked in contact with the Father. For that is the essence of prayer. This is the strong crying and tears of Heb. 5:7. The whole condition was enough to have killed Him of itself; it was indeed sorrow unto death (Mt. 26:38). It would have left His skin very sensitive and thin- and that skin was now to be subjected to whipping, piercing and other abuse.

*22:45 And when he rose up from his prayer, he went to the disciples, and found them sleeping from sorrow-* See on Mk. 14:72; Lk. 22:27. The manner of inspiration reflects how God sees His servants. Often the Spirit caused the Bible writers to portray God's children in an extremely positive way. Thus Lk. 22:45 says that the disciples fell asleep from sorrow, when in reality this was due to their lack of spiritual awareness and sense of spiritual urgency. Likewise, Lk. 1:18 records only a few (apparently harmless) of the many words which Zacharias doubtless said, not without strong disbelief, during the abnormally long time he remained in the temple. These examples illustrate how God looks so positively upon His children.

"Comes... and finds" are the very words used of the Lord's coming in judgment to 'find' the state of His people (Mt. 21:19; 24:46 "whom his

Lord when He *comes* shall *find* so doing"; Lk. 18:8 "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith...?"). And His 'coming' to the disciples found them asleep and unprepared. This was exactly the picture of Mk. 13:36 (and Lk. 12:37), using the same Greek words: "Watch... lest coming suddenly, He find you sleeping". We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was when he denied his Lord, and yet be saved out of it by repentance.

22:46 *And said to them: Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation-* Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "Pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the Lord later warns them: "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation". He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord's sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord's death so that they might share in His resurrection.

Without being ostentatious in the eyes of others, try to use a physical position in prayer which is conducive to concentration. There are Biblical examples of prayer standing, kneeling, sitting, sitting cross-legged, with hands uplifted... Remember how the Lord told the disciples to *rise* and pray; He could see that curled up as they were, they were more likely to nod off to sleep than intensely pray (Lk. 22:46). He had already told them to pray (v. 40), and doubtless they had obediently started praying, but had fallen asleep while doing so. "*Rise* and pray" surely suggests: 'Come on men, I told you to pray, but you can't pray lounging around like that!'. And I would bet many of us need the same words.

How He prayed is an example of the Lord's words being made flesh in His living. He taught His men to pray "Your will be done"; and in Gethsemane, He prayed those very words Himself, even though praying them meant an acceptance of crucifixion (Mt. 26:52). In that same context, the Lord asks His men to pray that they enter not into temptation (Lk. 22:46). He was asking them to pray His model prayer just as He was doing. His own example was to be their inspiration. I wonder too, in passing, whether the Lord's request at that time that the cup of suffering pass from Him (Mk. 14:35) was His way of praying not to

be led into temptation- for perhaps He momentarily feared that He would finally spiritually stumble under the burden of the cross? This surely is the meaning of the hymn that speaks of living more nearly as we pray.

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*22:47 While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them-*This was a tacit recognition of the fanatic loyalty of the eleven; Judas reckoned that they could put up enough of a fight to require this great multitude.

*He drew near to Jesus to kiss him-* It could be that the crowd of armed men were still hidden, and he came alone to make this act of identification of Jesus- again suggesting that the crowd of hired hoods were unclear as to which one of the group of disciples was Jesus. This is why Mt. and Mk. say that after the kiss, "then came they"- Judas was alone when he first approached the Lord. Although the Lord later protests that He had been with 'them' in the temple teaching, presumably that comment was directed only at the leadership of the group. Or perhaps it was simply because in the darkness it was not clear who was who, and Judas needed to make the identification for that reason. He needed to be alone to make that identification- he would've been unable to do it if he had approached Jesus and the disciples with the crowd of men next to him.

*22:48 But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?-* This was not to merely point out irony. The Lord didn't waste His words on throwaway remarks. This was a last minute, desperate appeal for repentance. The Lord's desire for Judas' repentance speaks volumes of His basic love; there was no vindictiveness, just a desire for the man's salvation. He is the same with each of us, and we should be the same to those who abuse us.

*22:49 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?-* Peter asked if he should strike

with the sword (Mt.) and then did so without waiting for a response. This is rather typical of us all. We assume Divine response, and thus play God.

Peter's objection to the Lord's going to die at Jerusalem surfaced several times. He wanted to build tents so that Jesus wouldn't go down from the mountain to the strange *exodos* which the prophets declared. When he wanted to "smite with the sword" in the Garden, it was to get the Lord out of the cross. Peter was willing to suffer, to fight, to even die in what would have been a hopeless combat, outnumbered dozens to one. But he just didn't want the cross to be the way. It is recorded that when Peter saw "what would follow" in the Garden, he wanted to start a fight in order to at least have some slim chance of avoiding that inevitable crucifixion which now looked so certain (Lk. 22:49). He didn't want the path of events to "follow" to that end. He again denied the connection between following and cross carrying. Later, the Lord told Peter in categorical terms that he personally was to follow Him to the death of the cross. And Peter turns around, sees John following, and gets side-tracked by the question of what the Lord thinks about John. As with us, quasi spiritual reasoning and issues were allowed to cloud and dilute the essential and terrifying truth- that we are called to bear Christ's cross to the end.

An essay in unquestioning loyalty to the Lord and Master is found in Lk. 22:49: "When they which were about him saw what would follow (i.e. arrest and attack), they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?". That grim-faced band of men standing in a protective circle around their Lord knew that they had no chance of victory against the mob with Judas, armed to the teeth as they were. Yet they were willing, to a man, to heroically sacrifice their lives- the inevitable result of starting a fight- as a token of loyalty to a man who humanly speaking was a lost cause, and whose demise seemed so unexpected to them compared to their hopes of a glorious Kingdom being established there and then.

22:50 *And a certain one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear-* Perhaps the detail is provided as backdrop for the Lord's response- that whoever *takes* the sword shall perish by it (Mt. 26:52). Peter did indeed take the sword- but by grace was saved from the consequence. He clearly aimed to strike off the man's head, but he ducked and Peter only caught his ear.

The material from Mark is about the same as in Matthew, but Luke and John add various details. Here is Matthew's account of the arrest in the Garden, with the details from Luke 22 and John 18 (on which see commentary) added in square brackets:

"The hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby. And while he yet spoke, Judas, one of the twelve, came; and with him a great crowd

with swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he. Take him. [Lk. 22:47,48 He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?] And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him. And Jesus said to him: Friend, do what you came to do. [Lk. 22 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?]. Then they came. [Jn. 18:4-9 Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one]. [then they] laid hands on Jesus and took him. And one of those with Jesus [Jn. 18 Simon Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear [Jn. 18 his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus]. Then said Jesus to him: [No more of this Lk. 22:51] Put away your sword into its place, [into its sheath, Jn. 18] for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now, send me more than twelve legions of Angels? [Jn. 18:11 The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?] [Lk. 22:51 And he touched his ear and healed him]. But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way? In that hour Jesus said to the mob: Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me. [Lk. 22 But this is your hour, and the power of darkness]. But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him and fled. [Lk. 22 And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance]”.

*22:51 But Jesus said: No more of this! And he touched his ear and healed him-* This is another example of where healings do not elicit faith. Judas and those men were so blindly committed to their path that even a plain miracle would not stop them. The Lord could have spoken the word, but He touched the man; another indication that He was totally in control and was giving His life rather than having it taken from Him.

*22:52 And Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?-* The same word used about Jesus and the

disciples 'going out' from the Upper Room to Gethsemane (Mt. 26:30; Jn. 18:1), and Jesus 'going forth' to meet the crowd of armed men who were coming against Him (Jn. 18:4). The impression is given of a head-on meeting between the forces of light and darkness.

22:53 *When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness-* The Lord was addressing the leadership of the group, who had sat daily in the temple over the past week and heard Him. They knew what He looked like, He had sat *pros humas*, "with you" (AV), not so much "with you" as 'directly facing you', sitting down in front of them and therefore at close range. Therefore the need for Judas to identify the Lord with a kiss, to prove "that same is He", was because the mass of armed men didn't know who He was, and had therefore not sat in the temple. Again we see the Lord recognizing that men are only who they are, the hired thugs were no more than hired thugs acting in ignorance; but the leaders who were present were the ones He wanted to address. This is confirmed by Lk. 22:52 stating that "Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?". The priests and elders were in that large crowd, and the Lord directly addresses them. So although He addressed "the multitudes", His message was aimed at specific individuals within the crowd. This is true of much of Scripture; perhaps those parts we personally fail to understand are speaking to a particular group in need of that message, perhaps in a previous age, and it may not be as directly intended for us as it was to them. The correspondence between the narratives is detailed and deeply credible. Uninspired writers would surely not only contradict themselves, but lack this artless congruence between each other which we find in the inspired Gospel records. Lk. 22:53 adds that the Lord continued to say: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness". The sense is surely that in broad daylight they dared not lay hold on Him- they had to do it under cover of darkness, because they were of the darkness.

22:54 *And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance-* There is great emphasis on the Lord being *led* (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16). And notice how Acts 8:32 changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was *led* (this isn't in the Hebrew text). His passivity is another indication that He was *giving* His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him. As noted on Mk. 14:51, it seems that Peter was the young man who followed dressed in a linen cloth.

This is recorded in the same words by all three Synoptics. It impressed them all as perhaps typical of so much of their 'following' the Lord; it was a following, but far off from Him. His challenge to Peter had been to not

just physically follow Him, but to pick up His cross and walk behind Him on His way to His cross (Mt. 16:24 s.w.). Following Jesus in the shadows and avoiding identification with Him was hardly the kind of following which He intended. Yet Peter recognized this, because his appeal for repentance describes his audience as likewise "afar off" (Acts 2:39 s.w.); he is asking them to make the conversion which he did, and he thereby considers his 'following afar off' as not really following at all, and being in a 'far off from Christ' position from which he repented and thereby 'came near' to Christ in conversion. The Greek words for 'followed' and 'afar off' are also used about how the few remaining disciples stood 'afar off' from Christ on the cross. The sense is perhaps that the Gospel writers recognized how far they were from co-crucifixion with Christ, and this sense is one we can identify with. And we are those likewise described in Ephesians as "far off" as Peter was, but are now likewise reconciled.

22:55 *And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat among them-* Mt. "and sat with the officers". The presence of the definite article suggests that "the servants" [the Greek also means "officers"] are a group which has already been mentioned, and surely they are the "servants" who comprised the crowd of armed men who arrested Jesus in the Garden. The same word is used three times about them in Jn. 18:3,12,18. The risk Peter was taking was considerable, seeing he had visibly been with the Lord in the Garden and had tried to kill one of the servants. We must give due weight to this- his devotion to his Lord was incomplete but all the same must be recognized for what it was as far as it was. So often those who aim higher than others in their spiritual devotions are those who fall the most publicly, and yet their devotion to their Lord should not be forgotten- for it is higher than the mass of other disciples.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Accusation 1	Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a maid came to him, saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean.	And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came one of the maids of the high priest. And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You	And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat among them. And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking	Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter was

		also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!	earnestly upon him, said: This man also was with him.	standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door. The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples?
Denial 1	But he denied before them all, saying: I do not know what you say.	But he denied it, saying: I neither know, nor understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.	But he denied it, saying: Woman, I do not know him.	He said: I am not!
Accusation 2	And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him and said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.	And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!	And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them.	Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself... Now Simon Peter was standing

				and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples?
Denial 2	And again he denied with an oath: I do not know the man.	But he again denied it.	But Peter said: Man, I am not.	He denied and said: I am not!
Accusation 3	And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter: Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known.	And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter: Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.	And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean.	One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?
Denial 3	Then he began to curse and to swear: I do not know the man! And immediately the cock crowed.	But he began to curse and to swear under oath: I do not know this man of whom you speak. And immediately the second time the cock crew	But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew.	Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew.
Peter's response 1	And Peter remembered the words which Jesus had said: Before the cock crows, you shall deny me three times.	And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times.	And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day, you shall	

			deny me three times.	
Peter goes out	And he went out and wept bitterly.	And as he thought upon it, he wept.	And he went out and wept bitterly.	

22:56 *And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking earnestly upon him, said: This man also was with him-* For the significance of the firelight, see on Jn. 3:14-21. Gk. 'a servant girl', "one of the servant girls of the High Priest" (Mk. 14:66). Her claim that "You also were with Jesus" may specifically refer to Peter's presence with Jesus in Gethsemane, for "the servants" of the High Priest had been there. Perhaps she was one of them. She describes Peter as being *meta* Jesus ["you were with Jesus"], and the same phrase *meta* Jesus is used to describe the disciples being *meta* Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36,51). Or since the Lord was a public figure in Jerusalem, it would be likely that Peter was known as one of those ever to be seen hanging around Him. Jn. 18:17 gives further information about her: "The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!". The only other time we read of a servant girl who was a door keeper is in Acts 12:16, where the servant girl [s.w.] called Rhoda was the door keeper at the home of the disciples in Jerusalem, and is thrilled when she realizes that it is Peter knocking at the door asking her to let him in. Note that "door keeper" is likely a technical term, a kind of profession. This heightens the similarity between the two characters. The similarities with the scene in Jn. 18:17 are too strong to be passed off as unintentional; for here Peter has to have the door to the courtyard opened by the servant girl, and it is at the gate that she recognizes him. Peter's failure, his denials, were the basis of his successful appeals for Israel to follow his pattern of repentance. Thousands heard him make those appeals in Jerusalem, for if a few thousand were baptized in one day, we can be sure that many others heard the message and didn't act upon it. It's highly likely that that servant girl was in the crowd, and was one who responded. I suggest that Rhoda was that servant girl, converted by Peter's failure, repentance and experience of forgiveness. She converted from serving the Jewish High Priest to serving the Heavenly High Priest, the Lord Jesus; from being one of the crowd who went out to arrest Jesus, to being one who glorified His resurrection.

22:57 *But he denied it, saying-* Matthew stresses the denial was before them all. Peter was living out the scene of condemnation at the last day, where the verdict likewise will be manifest "before all". The Lord had used the same word in saying that whoever denied Him "before men" [cp. "before all"], He will deny before the Father at the last day (Mt. 10:33). Peter appealed for Israel to repent on the basis that they had "denied"

Christ (Acts 3:13,14 s.w.)- he is appealing for them to realize that they had done what he had done, and yet they could repent, convert and experience the same grace he had done. His appeal, made a stone's throw from where the denials were made and only 6 weeks later, was therefore so powerful. Peter likewise used his failure in his pastoral work with his converts, warning them that to even deny the Lord who redeemed us is the worst possible thing we can do (2 Pet. 2:1). Likewise 1 Jn. 2:22,23 speaks of denying Christ as being the characteristic of the AntiChrist. And John wrote in the context of the early church having Peter as its first leader, and John of course was fully aware of Peter's failure that night.

Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. There is a passage in Proverbs 24:11,12 which has a strange relevance to Peter's self-condemnation. Having spoken of those being led away to death (the very context of Peter's denial), we read: "If thou sayest, Behold we know not this man: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?". This last phrase is quoted in Rev. 22:12 about the final judgment. Paul seems to consciously link Peter's church hypocrisy and legalism with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

*Woman, I do not know him*- Again, Peter was acting as the condemned, to whom the Lord will say "I know you not" (Mt. 25:12; Lk. 13:25). The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned; and yet he could change the verdict by repentance.

22:58 *And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them. But Peter said: Man, I am not*- John says that a group of men made the second accusation; see the parallel texts at the commentary on :55. Luke says that Peter replied to the second accusation [which Matthew says was made by a *woman*] by saying "*Man, I am not*".

Clearly the accusations and denials were in groups- the second 'denial' involved a number of people [a man, a woman and plural men] making accusations and Peter denying them all. If we put together the various records of Peter's three denials, it seems clear that a number of accusations were made, and he replied slightly differently each time. But there were three groups of accusations and denials. We can imagine the scene- there was a whole group of men and women present, all within earshot, and once one person made the accusation, others would've chimed in. But the account is stylized to group the denials in three groups, and Peter obviously perceived this after his final oath of denial. But in fact it seems that each denial was a series of separate denials. Indeed the tense of the verb "denied" suggests he kept on and on denying.

*22:59 And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean-* Matthew says it was a group of men, Mark says it was a maid; Luke says it was one individual who made the third accusation, and John says it was specifically a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. The three episodes of accusation and denial were therefore each comprised of a series of accusations and a series of denials. This means that the Lord was being generous in saying that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock crowed. Each episode of denial contained many separate denials.

*22:60 But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew-* The problem is that Mark says that the cock crowed after the first denial; and it is Mark who says that the Lord's warning was that "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Matthew and the others seem to speak of only one cock crow. There are various solutions. One is that we give full weight to the fact we are dealing with three episodes or groups of denials. If the first 'denial' involved three separate denials, then this fulfilled the prediction that there would be three denials before the cock crew. And the third episode of denials occurred before the second cock crow, this fulfilling the Lord's word as recorded by Mark "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Another is to go with the NIV footnotes on Mk. 14:30,72, which claim that earliest manuscripts omit the word "twice" and "second time". Another textual approach is to reflect that the record of the cock crowing after the first denial (Mk. 14:68) is omitted by most later translations after the AV. The text also could be suspect at that point. But I am distinctly uneasy at resolving apparent difficulties by claiming that verses are spurious and uninspired. Issues of translation, however, are of another order. I submit that Mk. 14:72 is capable of another translation. Most versions have to the effect that "Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny Me three times". But it could equally be translated 'You shall deny Me three times for each two crows of the cock'.

This would make a total of six denials. I suggest therefore that there were three denials from Peter during the first denial episode, before the first crowing of the cock; then another one or two denials during the second denial episode, and then another one or two during the third denial episode- and then the cock crew a second time. Another possible reconstruction was offered by Michael Cortright:

**First denial:**

A girl at the door to the courtyard (John 18:17).

**Second denial:**

A servant girl, by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:69, Mark 14:66, Luke 22:56).

**Third denial:**

A man by the fire in the courtyard (Luke 22:58).

**First crow.**

Mark 14:68 (King James Version).

**Fourth denial:**

Another girl, at the gateway (Matthew 26:71) or entryway (Mark 14:68,69).

**Fifth denial:**

Some anonymous (standing) people by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:73, Mark 14:70, John 18:25).

**Sixth denial:**

Another man who happens to be a male servant of the high priest (Luke 22:59, John 18:26).

**Second crow.**

Matthew 26:74, Mark 14:72, Luke 22:60, John 18:27.

*And he went out and wept bitterly-* There are connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgment seat. His bitter weeping connects most obviously with the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected. He was 'remaining outside' of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV "sat without"). Yet the Greek *exo* translated "without" or "outside" is elsewhere used about the rejected being "cast out" (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), 'standing without' with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn. 15:6). When we read that Peter "went out" from the Lord's presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included 'Before God!'. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. But in this life we can be condemned- and yet be reprieved through repentance. But remember that Judas likewise "went out" into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing with essentially the same group; point being, that

Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this. Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern. Perhaps Peter was encouraged towards repentance by recalling that just hours before, the Lord had predicted that the disciples would weep [s.w.], but their sorrow would be turned to joy (Jn. 16:20), in harmony with the Lord's earlier teaching of blessedness for those who weep now. His weeping was intense, and he must've wondered how ever such weeping could be turned to joy. The only answer was that Jesus would have to die for Peter's sin, be resurrected, forgive Peter and restore fellowship with him, even using him again in His service. It was upon this, then, that Peter desperately set his hope and faith- and it was rewarded.

22:61 *And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter-* The "day of visitation" is coming for us all (1 Pet. 2:12). The Greek is related to the word describing how after the denials, Christ turned and *looked* upon Peter (Lk. 22:61). This was for him his day of judgment, which we must all pass through. He called down Divine curses *upon himself* if he knew Jesus of Nazareth- and thus brought the curse of God upon himself (the record of his cursing and swearing refers to this rather than to the use of expletives).

*And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day-* "Peter remembered" the Lord's words. The letters of Peter urge his readers to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before" (2 Pet. 3:2). Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to "remember" [s.w. "mindful"] the words which their Lord had "spoken before" (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed, the same word is used about Peter 'remembering' [s.w. "be mindful"] all too late, the words which his Lord had "spoken before" to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not 'remembered' the words his Lord had "spoken before" to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to 'remember' or 'be mindful' [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness. See on 2 Pet. 1:12.

Appreciating the extent of Peter's devotion to the Lord's words enables us to more fully enter into the man's spiritual and emotional tragedy when he denied the Lord. He paid no attention to His words of warning concerning Peter's own spiritual weakness. After that third cock crow, "Peter remembered *the word* of the Lord, *how* he had said unto him..."

(Lk. 22:61; "how" may refer to the physical manner in which Christ spoke to Peter, as well as to the content of his words).

*You shall deny me three times*- Pliny records how Christians were asked to make a threefold denial of Christ (*Epistles* 10.97). It has been suggested that the account of Peter's threefold denials of Christ has been included in the Gospel records as an encouragement to those whose faith failed them that still there was a way back to restoration with the Lord Jesus, just as there had been for Peter. When Peter encourages his persecuted brethren to resist the "roaring lion" of Roman / Jewish persecution (1 Pet. 5:8), he is therefore to be seen as writing against a background in which he had actually failed the very test which his brethren were facing. Yet he can therefore even more powerfully encouraged them, because he had also experienced the Lord's restoring grace.

22:62 *And he went out and wept bitterly*- Peter "went out" from the Lord. "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30- in essence, Peter and Judas did the same thing at the same time). Other prototypes of the rejected likewise had gone out from the Lord. Cain "went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of condemnation- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep... but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now. See on Mk. 14:68.

here are connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgment seat. His bitter weeping connects most obviously with the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected. He was 'remaining outside' of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV "sat without"). Yet the Greek *exo* translated "without" or "outside" is elsewhere used about the rejected being "cast out" (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), 'standing without' with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn. 15:6). When we read that Peter "went out" from the Lord's presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included 'Before God!'. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. But in this life we can be condemned- and yet be reprieved through repentance. But remember that Judas likewise "went out" into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who

ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing with essentially the same group; point being, that Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this. Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern. Perhaps Peter was encouraged towards repentance by recalling that just hours before, the Lord had predicted that the disciples would weep [s.w.], but their sorrow would be turned to joy (Jn. 16:20), in harmony with the Lord's earlier teaching of blessedness for those who weep now. His weeping was intense, and he must've wondered how ever such weeping could be turned to joy. The only answer was that Jesus would have to die for Peter's sin, be resurrected, forgive Peter and restore fellowship with him, even using him again in His service. It was upon this, then, that Peter desperately set his hope and faith- and it was rewarded.

22:63 *And the men that held Jesus mocked him and beat him-* This was done by men who just minutes beforehand had been carefully upholding some isolated principles of Divine law and general legal integrity. Their appearance of culture vanished. They only could have been so crude and cruel if they first justified it in terms of their religion; spitting and beating would have been justified by them as the punishment due to a heretic. But here we see how they were justifying their own natural anger and jealousy by taking a tiny shard of Biblical precedent- for only in Dt. 25:2 do we have any justification for legal beating, and once it was finished, then there was to be no other punishment. The beating was to be on his back and not on his face; and there was no talk of spitting. But the Jews took that and used it to justify spitting in the Lord's *face*, beating Him with their fists and then further condemning Him to death. The only command to spit in the face of a man was if he refused to raise up children for his dead relative (Dt. 25:9); but this was totally irrelevant to the Lord Jesus. He in any case was the ultimate example of a man who did build up His Father's house. There is anger in each of us, and religious people at times give full vent to that anger by justifying it as righteous anger, grabbing hold of the vague implication of some Bible verse and taking it way beyond the obvious meaning of the verse. In doing so, they are behaving no better than these the very worst of men who have ever lived, committing the worst ever crime ever committed in the cosmos. The face of Jesus shone at times with God's glory; He was the face of God to men. And they spat in that face, and beat it. The wonder was that the Lord had specifically foreseen this- He had predicted that they would spit at Him (Mk. 10:34). He foresaw how they would fuel their anger against Him with their persuasion that He was a heretic.

22:64 *And they blindfolded him and questioned him saying: Prophecy-*

*who is he that struck you?*- They had blindfolded Him, and were challenging Him to exercise the prophetic gift of discernment by saying the name of the soldier who had struck Him. We note that 'prophecy' is not to be understood solely as the prediction of future events. The fact is, the Lord did know who had struck Him. They were clearly alluding to the fact that the Jews had concluded the Lord was a false prophet and false Christ and were punishing Him as such. See on Lk. 7:39.

*22:65 And many other things they spoke against him, reviling him-* "Blaspheming"; this was exactly the charge the Lord was being crucified for (s.w. Mt. 26:65), and so they blasphemed *Him*. We note how the Lord ahead of this had promised that all blasphemy against Him would be forgiven (12:10). Again, it seems the Lord foresaw these details of His death and sufferings; and forgave it ahead of time.

*22:66 And as soon as it was day, the assembly of the elders of the people was gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led him away into their council, saying-* They were careful to appear to obey their own laws and bylaws, whilst breaking God's law entirely. Again we have the impression of Psalm 2 being fulfilled, in the gathering together of Gentile powers against Messiah. The most orthodox and pious within Judaism were no more than Gentiles.

*22:67 If you are the Christ, tell us. But he said to them: If I tell you, you will not believe-* The Lord had been careful in His ministry not to specifically claim to be Messiah. Rather He had left His personality, words and works to leave those who encountered Him with the conviction that He was indeed Messiah. To simply 'tell' people truth doesn't mean they will believe; the word must be made flesh.

*22:68 And if I ask you, you will not answer-* As noted on :67, the Lord left individuals to be convicted in their own consciences. Formal telling and asking people will not elicit a response worth having; because the conviction is in their hearts.

*22:69 But from this time forward shall the Son of Man be seated at the right hand of the power of God-* The allusion is clearly to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge the Gentile world. And the Lord is saying that those hyper religious Jews were effectively condemned Gentiles before God. But those men to whom He spoke died in their beds. Lifespans were short in first century Palestine, most males were dead by 40. Most of them wouldn't even have lived to experience the calamity of AD67-70. They will only therefore "see the Son of Man sitting..." at His return, when they are resurrected and see Him in His glory. And this will be of itself their condemnation- to see Him there enthroned in glory, and themselves not in His Kingdom. This was exactly His teaching to them in Mt. 23:39: "You shall not see Me from this time forward, until you shall

say: Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord". They will then bless Him- but all too tragically late.

At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). The cross divided men: there were women who followed and mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

*22:70 And they all said: Are you then the Son of God? And he said to them: You say that I am-* "You say..." shows how the Lord sought to elicit confessions from men in their own words. The Lord's sensitivity is revealed in how He comments upon the Jews' question: "Art thou then the Son of God?". He replies: "Ye say it because I am" (Lk. 22:70 RVmg.). The Lord perceived that men ask a question like that because subconsciously, they perceive the truth of the matter, and in their conscience, they already know the answer to their question. Perhaps for this reason He simply ceased answering their questions as the trial went on (Lk. 23:9). He realized that the questions they asked were actually revealing the answers which were already written in their consciences. For a man of this psychological insight to have lived and died amidst and for such a primitive rabble is indeed amazing.

*22:71 And they said: What further testimony do we need? For we ourselves have heard it from his own mouth-* They themselves thus became the witnesses responsible for the Lord's death. Again, legal procedure, which they had tried so carefully to follow, was made a mockery of. They began with a conviction of plotting to destroy the temple buildings, then turned that into an accusation that He was a "Christ, the Son of God", a rival to Caesar; and now they jump on the charge of blasphemy, for which they gave Him the death penalty. And yet the Jews had no legal power to execute people; they had to present their case to the Roman authorities. And blasphemy was not a capital offence under Roman law. Their careful attempts to follow legal integrity broke down in pathetic collapse, and thereby they condemned themselves. The same word, *blasphemeo*, is then used of how the Jews "reviled" or blasphemed the Lord as He hung on the cross (27:39; Lk. 22:65). They had earlier accused the Lord of blasphemy at least twice during His ministry (Mt. 9:3; Jn. 10:36 s.w.). So they should have thought of that earlier in the trial, seeing they themselves were the witnesses of that supposed crime. We are left with the impression of a judge and jury increasingly desperate to find the Lord guilty, progressively throwing their integrity and legalism to the winds in their obsession to make Him guilty

of death. Little wonder that Pilate later remonstrated with them that Jesus was simply not legally guilty of any capital offence. But the more he made that point to them, the more they screamed for His death.

## CHAPTER 23

*23:1 And the whole company of them rose and brought him before Pilate-* Early in the morning, after an illegal night time trial. Their 'rising' may refer to a judge rising to give a verdict. They rose in condemnation of Him and went to Pilate to get the sentence carried out.

Israelites binding a man and delivering him over to Gentiles sounds very much like what Israel did to Samson. The Lord must've reflected how easily He likewise could have burst those bands and destroyed them all. The similarity with Samson is surely to remind us that He had those possibilities, but He was consciously choosing to give His life. The great paradox was that by accepting those bonds, He was thereby binding the strong man of sin and sin as manifested in the Jewish system (Mt. 12:29).

*23:2 And they began to accuse him, saying: We found this man perverting our nation and forbidding giving tribute to Caesar, and saying that he is Christ a king-* These were not the reasons for which they had condemned the Lord. The whole legal process was illogical and inconsistent from start to finish. The Lord had stated that tribute should be given to Caesar; no matter how well He had answered their earlier trick questions, they still decided He was guilty. He had also not stated that He was a king, except by implication; and He had carefully deconstructed any idea that He was in His lifetime a political king seeking His own kingdom.

*23:3 And Pilate asked him, saying: Are you the King of the Jews?-* Out of the various Jewish accusations against the Lord, this was the only one which directly affected the Romans, and was the technical reason for Pilate agreeing to the death penalty; it was this reason which was written over the Lord's head on the cross. The irony of the situation must have rubbed hard upon the Lord; He was dying as the King of a people, not one of whom would openly show loyalty to Him. In any suffering we may have because of feeling utterly alone, betrayed, having lived life to no end, not being shown loyalty by those we expect it of- we are connected with the spirit of the cross.

*And he answered them and said: You say it-* Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "You say it". It is stressed there that Jesus said nothing else, so that Pilate marvelled at His silent self-control. Yet Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). You'd expect him to be alluding to some major speech of Jesus. But it seems, reading his spirit, Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self-control, your strength of purpose, was great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example. Just one word. What a witness!'. As He witnessed in His

ministry, so must we (Rom. 2:19 cp. Mt. 4:16). As He witnessed before Pilate, so must we witness (1 Tim. 6:12,13).

*23:4 And Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds: I find no fault in this man-* We would have imagined that the talk of the Lord forbidding tribute to Caesar and proclaiming Himself a King would have led Pilate to at least pronounce some kind of guilty verdict. His insistence that there was "no fault in this man", especially as he was renowned for his lack of conscience, is all indication that he was deeply impressed with the Lord's righteousness, and even prepared to publicly defend it. According to John, it was only when the claim that Jesus was God's Son surfaced that Pilate felt the need to take the Lord aside to learn more. His reactions are very clear evidence of the Lord's self-evident righteousness and connection to the Father.

*23:5 But they were the more urgent, saying: He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee even to this place-* We sense their increasing desperation as the evident righteousness and innocence of the Lord was testified to by the clearly troubled state of Pilate's conscience.

*23:6 But when Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man were a Galilean-* Again we see Pilate's troubled conscience. He dearly wished to palm off responsibility for this case, and he pricks his ears up when he considers that the Lord is a Galilean.

*23:7 And when he knew that he was of Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem in those days-* As noted on :6, this was a reflection of Pilate's desperate conscience. For it was his responsibility and not Herod's to deal with issues in Jerusalem, and it was down to him to authorize capital punishment and not Herod. So sending the Lord to Herod was a desperate attempt to get out of the situation.

*23:8 Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad. For he had for a long time been desirous to see him, because he had heard about him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by him-* Yet Herod had earlier desired to kill the Lord (Lk. 13:31). Again, we see the power of conscience at work in Herod; for he was more than fascinated by the Lord and wanted to personally hear His teaching and see His miracles. Instead of just passing the death sentence for a known trouble maker, these rulers were clearly aware that they were dealing with no ordinary case.

*23:9 So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer-* As noted on 22:70, the Lord preferred to be silent because the answer was given within the consciences of the questioners. The Lord perceived that men ask their questions because subconsciously, they perceive the truth of the matter, and in their conscience, they already know the answer to their questions. Perhaps for this reason He simply ceased answering their

questions as the trial went on. He realized that the questions they asked were actually revealing the answers which were already written in their consciences. For a man of this psychological insight to have lived and died amidst and for such a primitive rabble is indeed amazing.

*23:10 And the chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him-* 'Devil' means 'false accuser'; here we have established the major theme which will dominate the later New Testament- that the Jews and Judaism was the great satan / adversary, the embodiment of false accusation against the Lord and all those in Him. They "stood by" Herod, identifying themselves with Him rather than with the Messiah of Israel.

*23:11 And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him, and dressing him in gorgeous apparel, sent him back to Pilate-* We see here human nature at its most raw and primitive. That is one feature of the crucifixion accounts. They were also motivated by a desire to test His claims to royalty. He had made it clear that His Kingdom was not of this world; His teaching about the Kingdom, largely in the parables, was about life lived now under domination of the Father's principles. And yet they willingly overlooked that and focused on mocking Him as a king. We note that Babylon too is arrayed in purple as the Lord was (Mk. 15:17; Rev. 17:4 s.w.), making her a veritable anti-Christ, a fake imitation of Him.

*23:12 And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day. For before they had been enemies-* This is phrased in terms of Ps. 2:1-3, where Messiah's enemies were to unite together against Him. The psychology presented here is absolutely true to observed human experience; a common focus upon a perceived enemy creates an illusion of unity, which then evaporates once the common enemy is no more. The same idea is to be found in the descriptions in Revelation of Israel's enemies uniting against her in the last days and then self-destructing. The unity between Jew and Gentile was to become typical of how the early church were persecuted in the same way as their Lord, as they fellowshiped His sufferings. The enmity may have been related to how Pilate had slain those of Herod's jurisdiction when they were offering sacrifices in the temple, mixing their blood with the temple offerings (Lk. 13:1,2). This shows Pilate's callous nature, and points up the power of the Lord Jesus in touching even a conscience like that.

*23:13 And Pilate called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people-* This reflects the complete guilt of Jewry; from the common people through to their political and religious leadership. They too were "called together" against the Lord, just as Gentile power was united in Herod and Pilate.

23:14 *And said to them: You brought to me this man, as one that perverts the people; and I, having examined him before you, found no fault in this man concerning those things of which you accuse him-* Pilate may have carefully chosen his word for "perverts". For it can also mean 'to bring again', specifically in repentance (s.w. Mt. 27:3 "brought again", Acts 3:26 and Rom. 11:26 "turning away" from sin). The Lord's mission was to turn Israel away from their sin. A man of Pilate's callousness was touched to insist time and again that the Lord was without fault. We should never therefore assume that anyone is beyond the reach of His spirit and personality. "No fault" is a phrase used three times by Pilate about the Lord (:4,14,22). This is one of Luke's tripilisms, designed so that illiterate people could remember it more easily.

23:15 *Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him-* Again and again, the otherwise conscienceless Pilate stresses the Lord's innocence. Neither he nor Herod had any worry about murdering innocent men. But the Lord's death worried them when they came up close to Him. Such is His power even today. We should never therefore write off anyone as beyond the power of the Gospel which is in Him. Herod had once wanted to kill John the Baptist, but now, encountering the One whom John had testified of, he had to admit the man's innocence.

23:16 *I will therefore chastise him and release him-* The crowd hated the Lord and wanted to see Him crucified. So they were coming to ask for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus, according to Matthew and Mark. But Pilate is so desperate to get the Lord off, so screaming was his conscience, that he misread the situation and grasped at this tradition of releasing a prisoner, hoping the Jews would want their King released and not crucified. Actually his offer only fomented their passions the more. According to Luke here, Pilate attempted to take the decision out of their hands by saying that Jesus was to be the prisoner to be released; and this also had the effect of piquing their desire for His crucifixion the more. For nobody, especially a mob, likes to feel railroaded out of their desired outcome at the last moment.

23:17 *(For it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast)-* This word for "release" is used of how Paul could have been released or "let go" because after examination by the Romans, "there was no cause of death in me" (Acts 28:18). Paul's trials are full of connection with those of the Lord, and Paul (like us) took special comfort in any similarity between the Lord's sufferings and his own. For this is indeed why we have such a mass of detail about the Lord's final sufferings- we are to see endless points of connection between His experiences and our own. And as Paul says, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It was to

this process which we signed up to at baptism, in which we dedicated ourselves to a life of dying and living with Him.

23:18 *But they cried out all together, saying, Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas-* Son of Abba, the father. This man was clearly an anti-Christ, a fake Christ, a man set up in appearance as the Christ, the son of God, when he was the very opposite. And Israel chose him. His similarity with the Lord is made even more interesting by the fact that some early manuscripts (such as the Caesarean, the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Palestinian Syriac) here read 'Jesus Barabbas' (Referenced in Craig A. Evans, *Matthew (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 p. 453.). The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man... this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all.

They cried out "together", despite their individual pangs of conscience. We see here the power of group think and culture, leading individuals to behaviour and positions which are far beyond where they personally stand. No wonder we are warned to watch those groups with whom we identify and join.

23:19 (*One who had been cast into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder*)- Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb...for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of

the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophecies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

*23:20 And Pilate spoke to them again, desiring to release Jesus-* We see here Pilate's persuasion of the Lord's sinlessness; and how he discounted even the talk about the Lord seeking to stop tribute being given to Caesar and to start a revolution. Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified.

*23:21 But they shouted, saying: Crucify, crucify him!-* When people are pressed for a reason for their unreasonable positions and behaviours, they simply say the same thing again, but more loudly (in various ways). This is the classic example- they repeated their cry "Let Him be crucified!". Surely Pilate knew that they would respond like this, and I see him as stage managing the entire crowd, purposefully leading the crowd to cry out ever louder, in order to set the stage for his public washing of his hands. But he played this elaborate game because he had a conscience, and wanted to try to separate himself from the decision to crucify the Lord.

*23:22 And he said to them the third time: Why! What evil has this man done? I have found no cause of death in him. I will therefore punish him and release him-* Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified. "The third time" is another of Luke's tripilisms, a feature included in the record to enable the memorization of the gospels; and to emphasize the point, that even the callous Pilate really struggled to not allow the murder of an innocent and righteous man. Pilate's attempt to "just" punish the Lord was however only going to pique the wrath of the crowd, as they sensed the Lord's crucifixion slipping out of their grasp. And by saying this, Pilate was effectively robbing them of the choice as to which man should be released. So his desperate attempt to save the Lord only backfired upon him.

23:23 *But they were insistent with loud voices, asking that he might be crucified. And their voices prevailed-* Where and how did *their* word prevail? Surely in the conscience of Pilate. The implication is that there was a struggle within him between their voice / word, and another word- that of God, made flesh in the man before him.

23:24 *And Pilate gave sentence that what they asked for should be done-* The record here clearly states Pilate's responsibility; he gave sentence. We may excuse our misbehaviours on the basis that there would have been huge consequences if we had not... disfellowshipped that brother, rejected that sister. But our actions remain as they are. Circumstance will never be too overpowering that we have no option but to sin (Ps. 125:3; 1 Cor. 10:13).

23:25 *And he released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will-* The delivering of the Lord to the will of the Jews is all written from a human perspective. For it was by the determinate will of God, and not of man, that the Lord was handed over to death; and He Himself gave over His life, it was not in fact taken from Him. We have here a parade example of how things may appear one way from a secular standpoint, when they are in fact quite different from heaven's perspective.

This handing over of the Lord to crucifixion was ultimately done by God, the "power" behind and through Pilate. There is an unmistakable Biblical link between the term "Son of God", the idea of God giving, and the death of the Lord Jesus. Whatever else this means, it clearly shows the pain to God in the death of His Son. Paul only uses "Son of God" 17 times- and every one is in connection with the death of the Lord. And often the usages occur together with the idea of God's *giving* of His Son to die- "He who did not spare His own son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). This sheds light on the otherwise strange use of another idea by Paul- that Jesus was 'handed over' to death (Rom. 4:25; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). It was the Father who ultimately 'handed over' His Son to death. The idea of God's Son being *sent* to redeem us from sin is perhaps John's equivalent (1 Jn. 1:7; 4:10; Jn. 3:16). Jesus was the Son whom the Father sent "last of all" to receive fruit (Mk. 12:6)- and it is reflection upon God's giving of His Son on the cross which surely should produce fruit in us. For we can no longer live passively before such outgiving love and self-sacrificial pain. And we are invited to perhaps review our understanding of two passages in this light: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son... to redeem" (Gal. 4:4) and "God sending His son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for [a sin offering] condemned sin, in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). These verses would therefore speak

specifically of what happened in the death of Christ on the cross, rather than of His birth. For it was in the cross rather than the virgin birth that we were redeemed and a sin offering made. It was on the cross that Jesus was above all in the exact likeness of sinful flesh, dying the death of a sinful criminal. The "likeness" of sinful flesh is explained by Phil. 2:7, which uses the same word to describe how on the cross Jesus was made "in the likeness of men". We can now better understand why the Centurion was convicted by the sight of Christ's death to proclaim: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:39).

Pilate's guilt here is plainly stated, especially as he himself realized he had the power to release the Lord. He delivered Him "to their will" (Lk. 23:25), tacitly accepting that their will was stronger than his; although all this happened according to the will of the Father and Son. The Gospels carefully omit any record of Pilate pronouncing a judgment of condemnation upon the Lord, as was required and usual. He did not do so because of the deep weight of conscience within him.

*23:26 And when they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it after Jesus-* Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as "coming out of the field" (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn't a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else... until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that *all* His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His

flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: "They got him to a place Golgotha". It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming around', the "Where am I?", the memory and consciousness flooding back. "Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

*23:27 And a great crowd of the people followed him, and women mourned and wailed for him-* As unworthy people wailed before Him on the cross (the Lord knew they would be condemned in the AD70 judgment rather than obey his words and flee the city), so they will wail (s.w.) before Him at the judgment (Mt. 24:30). The cross and the judgment are definitely connected. Men's feelings at the cross are a foretaste of our feelings before the enthroned, glorified Lord. And hence there is a connection between the breaking of bread, the judgment, the crucifixion, self-examination... it all comes together.

23:28- see on Lk. 7:9.

*But Jesus turning to them, said: Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children-* He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): "It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31); who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)".

Reflect for a moment upon the fact that the women wept, and amongst them were the Lord's relatives (Lk. 23:27). Lamentation for criminals on their way to die was not permitted in public. Suetonius (*Tiberius* 61) reports that "the relatives [of the crucified] were forbidden to go into mourning". Likewise Tacitus (*Annals* 6.19), Philo (*In Flaccum* 9,72) and Josephus (*Wars Of The Jews* 2.13.3,253). This is all quite some evidence, from a variety of writers. So why did they make this great sacrifice, take this great risk? The cross has power. Whether we feel it is impossible for us to be emotional, given our personality type, or whether we feel so lost in our own griefs that we cannot feel for Him there, somehow sustained reflection on the cross will lead us out of this. We will mourn, come what may. Yet the tragedy is that those women who risked so much didn't necessarily maintain that level of commitment to the end. For the Lord had to tell them that they should weep for themselves given the calamity that would befall them and their children in AD70- for they would not listen to Him.

23:29 *For the days are coming in which they shall say: Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!-* Josephus records that during the AD70 siege of Jerusalem, "one rich and noble woman, whose name was Mary, the daughter of Eleazar, being stripped of all she had, by the seditious, killed her own child, and dressed it, and ate part of it". In that day, the Lord's words would have been remembered. And this judgment would come upon those who had disobeyed the Lord's words to flee the city. The Lord is alluding to the curses for disobedience in Dt. 28:53-57. Those women weeping for Him were in fact the disobedient who would be cursed. The emotion of a moment for the sake of the suffering Lord Jesus is simply not enough. We must challenge ourselves with this thought. The Lord is also quoting from the words of Jer. 19:9 about the sufferings which the Babylonian siege would bring upon Jerusalem. He had no problem in seeing the events of

the Babylonian invasion as relevant to His day, and we likewise can see the large bulk of Old Testament material about Israel's historical sufferings as likewise coming true in the last days. Revelation presents those sufferings in language absolutely loaded with Old Testament allusion.

*23:30 Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: Fall on us, and to the hills: Cover us-* The Babylonian siege would be repeated in AD70 (Hos. 10:8); and these words are quoted about the feelings of the impenitent within the land of Israel in the last days, when every prophetic word shall come to its climax (Rev. 6:16). "Begin to say" could imply that the Lord was hopeful that they would repent. But Josephus says that during the AD70 siege "Hundreds of the Jews at the end of the siege hid themselves in subterranean recesses, and no less than 2000 were killed by being buried under the ruins of these hiding-places". In Rev. 6:16, the desire for the hills to fall upon them was because they sense that the wrath of the once crucified Lamb is even greater. The Lamb for sinners slain also has anger; He saw through the tears of those women, and was warning them of the huge price to be paid for what they were doing to Him.

*23:31 For if they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?-* He turned and spoke to the women on the walk to Golgotha; He looked out of His own agony to the needs of others. This is another theme of the cross. He was even thoughtful for weak Pilate (Jn. 19:11); for the thief, for the forgiveness of those mocking soldiers, for His mother, for John, for those women lining the Via Dolorosa... And those women, He said, would be destroyed in the condemnation of Jerusalem in AD70. Phil. 2:2-4 makes the point that the essence of the cross is in the way the Lord's mind was so full of concern for *others* throughout the whole wretched process. The Lord's Bible-filled mind would have been aware of Jer. 9:20-22, which prophesied special woe to women in the holocaust of AD70. Those women were condemned. Yet the Lord turned, in His desperate agony, to speak to them. I admit, as I must through every stage of the cross, that I wouldn't have done this. I wouldn't have bothered with them. But He made such effort to at least try to get them to change their minds. They were weeping for Him, but He knew they would not obey His command to leave Jerusalem when it would be surrounded by armies. Neither would their children. On a human level, they must have been so annoying. Young women (if they were alive in AD70 40 years later), probably passively in love with Him, moved to tears at His passion but with no regard for His words and the real implications of His cross. Yet still He tried for them, running the risk of cat calls of 'You can't carry your own cross but you can talk to the girls'. "If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; his

quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel...? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example. If the crossbeam was tied to the nape of the Lord's neck, it would have been impossible for Him to turn round and talk, as it is specifically stated that He did. I would reconstruct that the Lord collapsed, and Simon was forced to carry the cross, whilst the Lord followed on, scarcely conscious. Before collapsing again, with the result that He was carried to the cross, He used His last and final energy at the time to speak to those women. He used His last bit of mental and physical strength to preach- to women whom He knew were not going to really respond. For He said they should weep for themselves, He knew they would not listen to His warning to flee Jerusalem in AD70. But such was His hopefulness for people, that He still made the effort to communicate rather than get lost within Himself and His own thoughts as I would have tended to.

The humility of Mary was the pattern for the Lord's self-humiliation in the cross. Here above all we see the influence of Mary upon Jesus, an influence that would lead Him to and through the cross. Her idea of putting down the high and exalting the lowly (Lk. 1:52) is picking up Ez. 17:24: "I have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish". And yet these very words of Ezekiel were quoted by the Lord in His time of dying. With reverence, we can follow where we are being led in our exploration and knowing of the mind of Christ. His dear mum had gone around the house singing her Magnificat. He realized that she felt the lowly who had been exalted [and perhaps in some unrecorded incident before her conception she had been recently humbled?]. And Jesus had realized her quotation of Ez. 17:24. And He had perceived His linkage and connection with her, and how she saw all that was true of Him as in some way true of her, and vice versa. And now, in His final crisis, He takes comfort from the fact that like His dear mother, He the one who was now humbled, would be exalted. How many other trains of thought have been sparked in men's minds by the childhood instructions of their mothers...?

23:32 *And two others, both criminals, were led out with him to be executed-* Mt. 27:38 RV has a dramatic change of tense: "Then are there crucified with him...". Mark's present tenses are also arresting:

"plaiting... they clothe him... they smote..." (Mk. 15:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records.

*23:33 And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left-* Note the emphasis in the records on "unto", "to", "the place". They arrived. They stopped there. This was it. Golgotha possibly means 'The skull of Goliath'. In this case, we have opened up a detailed typological meaning to David's victory over Goliath. He was there as the Lord Jesus fighting sin, and then burying the head of Goliath, the 'man of sin', near Jerusalem. "Ephes-Dammim", where David killed Goliath, meaning 'border of blood' suggests 'Aceldama', the "field of blood". Goliath coming out to make his challenges at morning and evening (1 Sam. 17:16) coincided with the daily sacrifices which should have been offered at those times, with their reminder of sin and the need for dedication to God. The thoughtful Israelite must surely have seen in Goliath a personification of sin which the daily sacrifices could do nothing to overcome.

The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas').

John's Gospel has many references to Moses, as catalogued elsewhere. When John records the death of the Lord with two men either side of Him, he seems to do so with his mind on the record of Moses praying with Aaron and Hur on each side of him (Ex. 17:12). John's account in English reads: "They crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one" (Jn. 19:18). Karl Delitzsch translated the Greek New Testament into

Hebrew, and the Hebrew phrase he chose to use here is identical with that in Ex. 17:12. Perhaps this explains why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't mention that the two men on either side of the Lord were in fact criminals- he calls them "two others" (Jn. 19:18) and "... the legs of the first and of the other" (Jn. 19:32). Thus John may've chosen to highlight simply how there were two men on either side of the Lord, in order to bring out the connection with the Moses scene.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked. There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68):

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false... he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other

men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit...and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".*

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.

Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment? Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen 'em? I seen plenty of 'em. I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this

man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical reevaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person. In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity, would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia wood seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable. It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He

purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects...an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the malcirculation of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres' leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief (see 54), He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so.

Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7 concerning the



The pain and difficulty of speech in the position of crucifixion was such that it is apparent that the Lord meant us to hear and meditate upon the words He uttered from the cross. Perhaps it would have been far easier for Him to have prayed those words to Himself, within His own thoughts; but instead He made the effort to speak them out loud. The passion of the Lord's intercessions on the cross is matchless. He roared to God in His prayer, regardless of whether there was light or darkness (Ps. 22:1,2). He reflected there that His prayer was offered to God "in an acceptable time" (Ps. 69:13). And yet this very passage is taken up in 2 Cor. 6:2 concerning the necessary vigour of *our* crying to God for salvation. That the intensity of the Lord's prayerfulness and seeking of God on the cross should be held up as our pattern: the very height of the ideal is wondrous.

It is worth noting that if the Lord's seven recorded utterances are placed in the conventional chronology, the number of words He actually spoke can be seen to steadily decrease until the final utterance (although it should be noted that in our reconstruction, saying 3 comes before no. 2). Not only does this serve to illustrate the intensity of effort wrung forth from our Lord in His final utterance, but we also sense that He found physically speaking increasingly difficult.

"Father forgive them" were the first words said by the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross. It seems from the context that they were said soon after the cross was lifted up into a vertical position and dropped down into the hole prepared for it. Physically, this would have been the time of greatest shock and pain, as the body of Jesus came to rest with its full weight upon the nails, as they tore into the flesh and sinews of His hands and feet. As His nervous system began to fully react, He was in great pain and shock. And yet immediately His thoughts went to forgiving those who had brought this upon Him; and, as we hope to see, His thoughts were immediately with us, with the possibility of our salvation and forgiveness. In this we see a matchless example of being so concerned for the salvation of others, so taken up with a desire to show love to those who hate us, that the physicality of our own sufferings, however immediately and insistently they press, becomes totally relegated.

We must face up to a fundamental question: Who was it that the Lord was asking God to forgive? By eliminating who He did *not* pray for, we can come towards an answer. He did not pray for the world (Jn. 17:9), which in the context seems to refer to the unrepentant Jewish world (cp. Jer. 11:14; 1 Jn. 5:8) as well as the surrounding (Roman) world.

Forgiveness is related to repentance. There would seem little point in the Lord praying for the Roman soldiers to be forgiven. It would be rather like a believer praying for some youths to be forgiven for vandalizing a bus

shelter; to what point would this be? Would such a prayer really lead them towards salvation? Would it be an appropriate thing to pray for?

Throughout the Acts, both Peter and Paul accuse the Jews of having crucified the Lord, even though the Roman soldiers physically did it. Peter even goes so far as to say that it was their *hands* which placed Jesus on the cross and nailed Him (Acts 2:23- notice how their physical contact with the Lord's body is stressed in Mk. 14:46,53). The Roman hands which did this were effectively Jewish hands. Psalms 22 and 69 outline in some detail the things done to Christ on the cross. Some were done by the Jews, others by the Romans. And yet the same pronoun "they" is used, as if these things were all done by the same group of people. This further suggests that the Spirit saw the actions of the Romans as being attributable to the Jews. There seems no reason to think that the Roman or Italian nation were held guilty by God for the part they played in the death of His Son.

The Jewish people generally were punished because they saw the Son of God coming to their vineyard, and yet they killed Him, despite recognizing who He was. "This is the heir", they recognized (Mt. 21:38). Pilate *therefore*, because of the Jews, ordered the death of the Son of God (Jn. 18:40 cp. 19:1). They must take full responsibility for it. The Roman soldiers set Christ at nought (Lk. 23:11); but this very act (the same word is used) is counted to the Jews (Acts 4:11). The Lord Jesus shouted out to them that He knew that they realized who He was: "Then cried Jesus in the temple as He taught, saying, You both know me, and you know from where I am" (Jn. 7:28). His allusion to the memorial Name ("I am") suggests that He recognized that they knew His Divine origin and manifestation of His Father's Name. The Lord was responding to their claim that they did not think He was Messiah (Jn. 7:27)- by saying 'You do know, deep inside, that I am He; but you won't face up to your conscience about it'. It was in this sense that Jesus frequently said in John's Gospel that the Jews did not know Him nor His Father. However, this does not mean that they did not recognize who He was. To "know" Christ in the Johannine sense is to believe in Him, not just to give Him cognizance. It would be a massive contradiction within the thinking of Jesus for Him to ask God to forgive the whole Jewish people *because* they didn't realize what they were doing. According to His parable of the men recognizing the heir and killing him, they did know, perfectly well, what they were doing. If indeed He was praying for the entire Jewish nation, His prayer went unanswered. He had said Himself that if the Jews did not repent and believe in Him, they would die in their sins; He said that an impressive three times (Jn. 8:21,24).

It seems that the Lord was in some way praying for those among the Jews who would later repent of what they had done. This suggestion must

almost certainly have some truth about it because of the way Peter alludes to Christ's words: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do". He seems to apply these words to the Jews, and uses them to encourage the Jews to repent and thereby take unto themselves the forgiveness which Christ's prayer had made possible: "And now, brethren, I wot that through (RV "in") ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers... repent ye *therefore*" (Acts 3:17,19 AV). Paul makes a similar allusion in Acts 13:26,27: "Men and brothers, children of the stock of Abraham... they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers (cp. 3:17), because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him".

There is a clear principle throughout God's self-revelation that ignorance does not atone for sin. "Father forgive them *for* they know not what they do" therefore does not mean that their ignorance plus Christ's prayer equalled forgiveness and therefore salvation. We have to conclude that He was saying 'They don't *now* know what they are doing, please forgive them on account of my death, they'll repent and realize later'. Despite Peter's allusion to Christ's prayer for their forgiveness, Peter still asks the Jews to repent so that they could be forgiven and saved. Therefore Christ's prayer for their forgiveness was not offered or answered in the sense that they would be forgiven without repentance. That forgiveness was only granted in prospect. They had to 'claim' it by their own repentance. However, it is still wondrously true that Christ understood that God was willing to grant forgiveness to people in prospect, even though they had not actually repented. If God is willing to do this, to forgive in hope of future repentance in response to such great grace, how much more should we behave likewise to each other. And yet we struggle with this, even though we each have received such grace ourselves.

The Lord's death was fundamentally for the salvation of Israel. His prayer was gloriously answered in that soon afterwards, 8,000 Jews were baptized (Acts 2:41; 4:4). Such is the power of anguished, heartfelt prayer for others- even when it seems there is no chance it will be heard. And such is the power of prayer for a third party. The Lord's attitude was not that they simply had to decide. He prayed they would be converted. It only applies to us insofar as we unite ourselves with the Israel of God. That minority within Israel who were crucifying Christ in ignorance ("they know not what they do") were the same category into which we fall. Christ praying on the cross for men to be forgiven ought to send the mind back to Is. 53, which prophesied that on the cross, the Christ would "justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities", be wounded for our transgressions, be bruised for our iniquities, make a sin offering for His seed, heal us through His stripes, achieve our peace with God through His chastisement, bear the sin of many, be numbered with the transgressors, be stricken "for the transgression of my people", and make "intercession for the transgressors". These are all broadly parallel statements. "The transgressors" are primarily "my people", Israel, who despised and

rejected him (Is. 53:3). And yet they also refer to us, insofar as we become identified with Israel in order to be saved. The prophecy that Christ would make "intercession for the transgressors" in His time of dying was surely fulfilled when He prayed "Father forgive them". There seems no other real alternative.

And so we come to an awe-inspiring conclusion: the Lord was lifted up on the cross, and immediately His mind was full of us, all those who would repent and become the seed of Christ, full of our need, of the huge weight of all our sins. And He knew that through His death all that sin would be forgiven. It was by the Lord's one act of righteousness, one act of obedience, that we are justified (Rom. 5:18,19). He was obedient to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8); and yet Heb. 5:8 and Phil. 2:8 RV imply that He only became obedient whilst He was actually on the cross. Was it that there, whilst hanging there, He more deeply perceived that really, this was indeed the only way to meet our need- and therefore He made that one-off act of obedience in death which Rom. 5:19 speaks about. And that supreme love for us, that willingness to die "for us", is still part of His wonderful character; for there He "loved us" [the love of Christ and the cross are so often connected ideas], and yet He still has that same "love of Christ" for us today (Rom. 8:35,37).

As soon as the cross was lifted up, despite the sudden searing pain, His mind was fixed upon our desperate need: "Father forgive them". Each one of us who have now believed down through the subsequent years was forgiven then, in that moment, of all our sins we would ever commit. Through one act of righteousness [i.e. the cross], we were justified (Rom. 5:18 RV). There was such intensity of achievement in those moments of His death. Here on earth, on a mere speck of a planet in the outer suburbs of a galaxy that is only one of about a billion such galaxies in the observable universe, what happened on the cross determined the future of that universe. For all things both in heaven and in earth were reconciled by the blood of the cross. And yet throughout the Gospels Christ had taught that the Father would only forgive those who themselves live a forgiving life. Yet at that time we had not repented; "When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly... God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us... when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son" (Rom. 5:5-10).

Our Lord's prayer was heard; our sins, unrepented of, were forgiven, in prospect we were forgiven and saved. In the same way as Peter used the wonder of this to appeal to the Jews to repent, so we should heed the appeal. All our sins were forgiven as a result of that prayer; in prospect

we were saved. God for the sake of that prayer of Christ forgave us all our sins then (Eph. 4:32), the whole concept of sin was ended in prospect (Dan. 9:24), one final sacrifice was offered for sins (Heb. 10:12). The result of this is that we should repent, search ourselves and confess as many of our sins as possible, knowing they have been conquered. And we too should forgive each other in the same manner as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32), not waiting for repentance, but learning the spirit of Christ and the attitude of our Father.

The extreme seriousness of our position prior to our reconciliation with God is easy to underestimate. We were "enemies... sinners". We have seen that "Father forgive them" refers to both us and the ignorant Jews who were crucifying Christ. And yet in the first instance, the "them" referred to the Roman soldiers; *they* crucified the Lord, they parted His garments; and it is in that context that He asked for "them" to be forgiven. There is a certain relevance of Christ's words to those ignorant soldiers. And yet we have seen that they really refer to us, to all those who will truly repent of their sins. It follows that those soldiers represent us, as the Jews who rejected and despised Christ in Is. 53 represent us too. Truly do we sing that "We held him as condemned by Heaven", albeit in ignorance. The roughness and ignorance of those soldiers typifies our life before baptism. If we continue sinning, we crucify again the son of God, this time not in ignorance. The consequences of that are almost too fearful to imagine.

Ignorance is no atonement for sin, as the Law taught. "Forgive them *for* they know not what they do" sounds as if Christ felt that He was the offering for ignorance, which was required for both rulers and ordinary Israelites (cp. how Peter and Paul describe both the rulers and ordinary people as "ignorant", implying they had a need for the ignorance offering of Christ, Acts 3:17; 13:27). Indeed, Is. 53:10 NIV describes the Lord's death as a "guilt offering". And significantly, Heb. 5:2 describes Him as a good priest who can have compassion on those (i.e. us) who have sinned through ignorance and want reconciliation. As we come, progressively, to realize our sinfulness, we need to make a guilt offering. But that guilt offering has already been made, with the plea "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do".

"Father forgive them" was uttered with His mind on all our future sins, He foresaw them all, He felt them upon Him, He saw they could not be forgiven without repentance, and yet He asked the Father to forgive them as sins of ignorance, believing that we would repent in the future. No wonder Peter and Paul use these words of the Lord as the basis of their appeal to Israel to repent! And if we appreciate them, we will be inspired to truly examine ourselves, to realize our secret sins, to search the word in order to reveal our sins to us, to ask God after the pattern of David to reveal our weakness to us, to truly confess our sins, knowing that each

and every one of them was recognized by the Father and Son as Christ hung on the cross. Every one of them was a weight upon Christ, and every one of them was forgiven in the hope that we would later appreciate the wonder of such grace, and repent. This means that as with Israel in Acts 3, our repentance is what makes the cross of Christ powerful for us, it is what makes the victory of Christ all the greater if we accept it; for when we repent, "our unrighteousness commends God's righteousness", in the language of Romans.

In some sense, then, the Lord was aware of each of us and each of our sins as He hung there. "Forgive them" was wrung out of this deep appreciation. Just one word (in the Greek) expressed such intensity of appreciation of our need. It seems that as Christ hung on the cross He had a vision of the faithful. How this was achieved is hard to imagine, but it is not beyond the realms of Divine possibility that somehow Christ was made aware of each and every one of us, and each of our sins. Consider the following hints concerning the Lord's vision of His ecclesia on the cross:

- "*When* You shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed... he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Is. 53:10,11). "*When*" would suggest that the Lord had some kind of vision of those He was offering Himself for, especially in their future, forgiven state.
- Psalms 22 and 69 describe Christ on the cross foreseeing "the great congregation" gratefully and humbly eating in memory of Him (cp. the breaking of bread), serving Him, inheriting Zion and declaring His righteousness and His victory on the cross to others down the generations. Let us remember this as we break bread and witness to Him (Ps. 22:30,31).
- On the cross the Lord saw all His bones, which represented the future members of His body (Ps. 22:17 cp. Eph. 5:30).
- The Lord prayed just before His passion in a way which would almost imply that He had some heightened awareness of the redeemed as a group: "...for them also which shall believe in me... that they also may be one".
- "For the joy that was set before him" the Lord endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). "Set before" can imply a vision, as if He saw something in front of Him as He hung on the cross. The spirit of Christ in Ps. 16:11 describes the Lord looking forward to fullness of joy in God's Heavenly presence, because "at your right hand are pleasures for evermore". He is now at God's right hand interceding for us. Therefore we suggest that the joy set before Christ in vision as He hung on the cross was the joy of His future mediation for our sins as we repent of them and confess them in prayer.

The intensity of feeling behind those words of our Lord almost defies exhibition through the medium of human words or language. Heb. 5:1-7

describes the Lord on the cross as a priest offering up a guilt offering for our sins of ignorance. He did this, we are told, through "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears". This must surely be a reference to "Father forgive them". Those were said with a real passion, with strong crying, with tears as He appreciated the extent of our sinfulness and offence of God. There is a connection between these words and those of Rom. 8:26,27, which describes the Lord as our High Priest making intercession for us "with groanings". "Groanings" is surely the language of suffering and crucifixion. It is as if our Lord goes through it all again when He prays for our forgiveness, He has the same passion for us now as He did then. Think of how on the cross He had that overwhelming desire for our forgiveness despite His own physical pain. That same level of desire is with Him now. Surely we can respond by confessing our sins, by getting down to realistic self-examination, by rallying our faith to truly appreciate His mediation and the forgiveness that has been achieved, to believe that all our sins, past and future, have been conquered, and to therefore rise up to the challenge of doing all we can to live a life which is appropriate to such great salvation.

*23:35 And the people stood watching-* The other two were there, but the people all watched Jesus. He was lifted up, and He drew all men (all men's eyes, in the primary sense) unto Him (Jn. 12:32). And the cross has that same magnetism today.

*And the rulers also scoffed at him, saying: He saved others-* A tacit recognition that His healing miracles and the resurrection of Lazarus were undeniable. "He saved others" would have been a reference to Lazarus. His was a well-known case among the Jews (was Lazarus there? It would have been strange if He had not been). The Lord's mind would have choked at the memory of dear Lazarus, Martha, Mary, the now shattered family whom He had loved and still loved.

*Let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, His chosen!-* All the emphasis on save *yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

*23:36 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him offering vinegar, and saying-* Matthew notes that the Lord refused to drink it after tasting it. The tenses imply that the offer was made continually.

To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well-known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He

knew the custom, and He knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? "When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that "they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).
- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.
- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) "Father, forgive them", and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.
- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to the absolute height of identity with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh... I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't

drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: "They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation 'poison' (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the highest level; our salvation would surely have been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but "such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but "even the death of the cross".

One feels that the Lord would have been justified in accepting the pain killer that was offered Him in His final agony; but He refused it, it seems to me, in order to achieve the *greatest* salvation for us. He never once used what I have called the principle of Jephthah's vow. In the same spirit, some faithful men of old refused legitimate deliverance from torture so that they might obtain "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The record of the cross is full of examples of where the Lord in physical terms rejected legitimate comforts in His final hours. Yet throughout His life, He was ever ready to concede to the weakness of those who would genuinely follow Him. The way He spoke about demons without giving His hearers a lecture about the folly of such belief is proof of this. He could have insisted, as we do, on the rejection of such superstitions. But this was not His way. I am not suggesting that we have the right to make such concessions in our preaching and baptizing. But He did.

23:37 *If you are the King of the Jews*- His claims to Kingship, and the claim of His placard, was a repeated jibe. It must have seemed so incongruous that this wretchedly suffering man actually thought Himself to be a King. "If... let him come down" may have been followed by a pause: is He going to do anything? In their hearts they must have known that He had had the ability to pull off this kind of thing. Those silent pauses must have been an agony for the Lord. There were probably many in that crowd half sympathetic to His wretched cause, who, on the surface, really might have believed if He had come down. But He had learned the lesson in the Galilee days, that impressive miracles didn't really instil faith (Pentecostals etc. still fail to realize this).

The mocking Jews fall strangely silent in the crucifixion accounts. The Lord had plainly foretold that when they had lifted up the Son of man, then they would know "that I am he", and would recognize His Divine Sonship (Jn. 8:27). There was something about the vision of Christ crucified which convicted them of their folly and of the Divinity of God's Son. And that power burns on today.

*Save yourself*- All the emphasis on *save yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

23:38 *And there was also a written notice above him: This is the King of the Jews*- It was also written in Hebrew (Jn.), and putting together the gospel records, it said "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews". Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare his righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him...in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

It is possible to argue that "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would require the use of words, the first letters of which created the word YHWH:

y Jesus- Yeshua

h The Nazarene- Ha'Natzri [cp. "the sect of 'The Nazarene(s)', Acts 24:5]

v and King- u'Melek

h of the Jews- Ha'Yehudim

giving the Yahweh Name:

hvhy

This is why the Jews minded it so strongly when the title was put up. Pilate's retort "What I have written I have written" may well have been an oblique reference to 'I am that I am'. It was his attempt to have the last laugh with the Jews who had manipulated him into crucifying a man against whom there was no real charge. It was as if the Lord suffered as He did with a placard above Him which effectively said: 'This is Yahweh'. The Name was declared there, as the Lord had foreseen (Jn. 17:26). The declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses in Ex. 34:6 thus becomes a foretaste of the Lord's crucifixion. Some LXX versions render Ex. 34:6 as 'Yahweh, Yahweh, *a man* full of mercy....'. In the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus the essence of Yahweh was declared. And we, John says with reference to the cross, saw that glory, as it were cowering in the rock like Moses, *full* of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 cp. Ex. 34:6 RV).

There are other reasons for thinking that there was the supreme manifestation of Yahweh in the cross of His Son:

- It has been observed that the blood of the Passover Lamb on the lintels of the doors at the Exodus, three sides of a square, would have recalled the two repeated letters of 'Yahweh' (see above panel), as if His Name was manifested in the blood of the slain lamb.
- Yahweh laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).
- Yahweh had prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: "I am, I am: He that blots out thy transgressions" (Is. 43:25 LXX). He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord's cross.
- Jehovah-Jireh can mean "Yahweh will show Yah" (Gen. 22:14), in eloquent prophecy of the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely.
- Paul speaks of how the cross of Christ should humble us, so that no flesh should glory in God's presence (1 Cor. 1:29); as if God's presence is found in the cross, before which we cannot have any form of pride.
- The LXX uses the word translated "propitiation" in the NT with reference to how God forgave / propitiated for Israel's sins for His Name's sake (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 79:9). That propitiation was only for the sake of the Lord's future death, which would be the propitiation God ultimately accepted.

Having no past or future with Him, Yahweh could act as if His Son's death had already occurred. But that death and forgiveness for "His name's sake" were one and the same thing. The Son's death was the expression of the Father's Name.

- There was a Jewish tradition that the only time when the Yahweh Name could be pronounced was by the High Priest, when he sprinkled the blood of Israel's atonement on the altar. The Name was expressed in that blood.

- Zech. 11:13 speaks of Yahweh being priced at thirty shekels of silver by Israel. But these words are appropriated to the Lord in His time of betrayal. What men did to Him, they did to the Father.

- The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, "as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father.

- The blood of the sin offering was to be sprinkled "before the LORD, before the veil" (Lev. 4:6,17). Yet the veil was a symbol of the flesh of the Lord Jesus at the time of His dying. At the time of the sprinkling of blood when the sin offering was made, the veil [the flesh of the Lord Jesus] was identifiable with Yahweh Himself. The blood of the offerings was poured out "before Yahweh" (Lev. 4:15 etc.), pointing forward to how God Himself, from so physically far away, "came down" so that the blood shedding of His Son was done as it were in His presence. And who is to say that the theophany that afternoon, of earthquake and thick darkness, was not the personal presence of Yahweh, hovering above crucifixion hill? Over the mercy seat (a symbol of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews), between the cherubim where the blood was sprinkled, "there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Ex. 25:22). There we see the essence of God, and there in the cross we hear the essential word and message of God made flesh.

- The smitten rock was an evident type of the Lord's smiting on the cross. And yet in Deuteronomy especially it is made clear that Israel were to understand Yahweh as their rock. And yet "that rock was Christ". God Himself said that he would stand upon the rock as it was smitten- presumably fulfilled by the Angel standing or hovering above / upon the rock, while Moses smote it. And yet again it is Yahweh who is described as smiting the rock in Ps. 78 and Is. 48:21. He was with Christ, directly identified with Him, at the very same time as He 'smote' Him.

Lk. 22:36,38 record that the inscription on the cross was "also" written- connecting with how the soldiers "also" mocked Him. The inscription was intended as another mockery; but it was a vital part in declaring God's glory. The incident is typical of how those things which seem the most negative and unspiritual are used by the Father to His and our glory in the end.

23:39 *And one of the criminals that hung there hurled insults at him, saying: Are not you the Christ? Save yourself and us-* The man believed

Jesus was Christ, but he understood the Messiah as offering immediate salvation. And the Lord's whole teaching was that the Kingdom was about delayed gratification, coming to its full term in the future establishment of His Kingdom at His return and the resurrection of the dead. We learn from this that mere acceptance that Jesus of Nazareth was someone special, even very special, is no guarantee of salvation. It is His message, the word which was made flesh in Him, which has to be obediently believed.

*23:40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said: Do you not even fear God, seeing you have the same judgment?-* The thieves had the same judgment as the Lord Jesus; death on a cross. It was God who needed to be feared, rather than asking favours of Jesus as Messiah. And yet the second thief clearly believed the Lord was God's Son who would return as judge to establish His Kingdom. He displays therefore a fine appreciation of the relationship between the Father and Son. He urges the first thief to not ask favours of the dying Jesus, but to instead "fear God", appreciating that His Son was sharing in their deaths, and yet in the power of God would resurrect, and return in glory to judge men and establish His Kingdom.

*23:41 But we indeed justly. For we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong-* The cross is capable of interpretation as some kind of judgment seat or throne. And significantly, there are men on the right hand and left of the Lord, one rejected, the other gloriously accepted. It is possible to translate the repentant thief as telling the other: "Do you not fear God *when* you stand condemned?". Before Jesus crucified, we all stand condemned. And he stresses that "we are condemned justly" (Lk. 23:41), for it was evident to all that here hung a just / righteous man. He, there, the just hanging for the unjust, convicts us of sin. Somehow the repentant thief came to know Jesus in the deepest possible sense. Truly could he address him as "Lord", perceiving already how the cross had made Him "Lord and Christ". The thief knew that judgment day was coming, and asked to be remembered for good there. He was surely alluding to Ps. 106:4: "Remember me, Lord, in the course of favouring your people. Visit me with your salvation". And this connection between the cross and the judgment was evidently impressed upon the thief. Doubtless he also had in mind the desperate plea of Joseph: "Have me in remembrance when..." you come into your position of power (Gen. 40:14 RV). The thief had perhaps meditated upon the implications of the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come". He saw it as now being certain because of the cross- "when you come in your Kingdom...". And yet he felt as if he was in prospect already there before the coming King, as he hung there before Him on the cross.

*23:42 And he said: Jesus, remember me when you come in your*

*kingdom*- Note the Joseph allusions- in prison with two malefactors (one good and one bad?) as Christ on the cross with two thieves (one good, one bad). "Remember me when it shall be well with thee" (Gen. 40:14) = "Remember me".

23:43 *And he said to him: Truly, I can say to you today right now, that you will indeed be with me in Paradise*- "Luke elsewhere uses "today" to refer to immediate salvation (2:11; 4:21; 5:26; 13:32; 19:9); "Luke's Gospel, then, insists that salvation is not simply a radically future experience but a thing of the present". Always in the OT, "I say unto you this day" was used as a Hebraism to bring home the utter solemnity of some great truth (e.g. Dt. 4:26,39; 8:19).

The thieves (and Barabbas) would have been tried along with Jesus; they would have been present at His trial. Roman law required that the death penalty be executed the same day as it was given. The crucifixion being quite early in the day, it seems almost certain that the four cases to be tried that day would all have been heard in the same room. The behaviour of the Lord must have really given those other three something to reflect on. An interesting point comes out of the Greek text of Lk. 23:39: "One of the criminals who were *suspended* reviled him" (Diaglott). Ancient paintings show the thieves tied by cords to the crosses, not nailed as was Christ. *Hanging* on a tree became an idiom for crucifixion, even if nails were actually used (Dt. 21:23 cp. Gal. 3:13; Acts 5:30; 10:39). If this were so, we see the development of a theme: that the whole ingenuity of man was pitted against the Father and Son. Christ was nailed, not tied; the tomb was sealed and guarded; the legal process was manipulated; the Lord was flogged as well as crucified.

It is all too easy for us to see the thief on the cross as a pawn in the game of the Lord's crucifixion. But there is real New Testament evidence that we are to see in Him our personal representative. Thus Paul challenges us to be "co- crucified" with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20 cp. 1 Cor. 11:1). To be crucified together with Christ immediately sends the imaginative mind to the thief on the cross- the one who was literally crucified together with Christ. It is doubtful if the Spirit in Paul would speak of 'co- crucifixion' without deliberate reference back to the thief. Our Lord matched the idea of the word "Kingdom" in the thief's plea with the word "paradise". Occurring only three times in the New Testament, it is hard to resist the conclusion that in Rev. 2:7, our Lord's mind was back in the agonizing conversation with the thief: "To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God". It was to the thief on the cross, some years earlier, that Christ had made the same promise of paradise. It may be significant that Rev. 2:7 was specifically addressed to those who were zealous by nature, hating laxity, yet who had left their first love. The thief may well have been a

'zealot' who had once turned to Christ, but whose real faith had slipped away. But to any who overcome, the same promise of paradise is made.

It has often been pointed out that the brief words of the thief encompass all the basic beliefs of the One Faith. He believed in the sinfulness of man, the supreme righteousness of Christ, salvation by grace, the second coming and judgment seat of Christ, and the Kingdom. Yet not only did he believe those things as abstract principles. As he beheld, at close range, the sufferings of God's peerless son, the reality of those principles really came home to him. Perhaps he was a slave who had committed a relatively petty crime, but as a slave he had to be crucified. All prisoners and most condemned men feel keenly their relative innocence and the unfairness of it all. But with quite some pain he gasped: "...and we indeed justly". He came to deeply understand the basic principles, and appreciate their personal bearing to himself. He knew the basic principles of the true Gospel, but it was his co- crucifixion with Christ that made him grasp hold of them for dear life. Job too went through the same process, thanks to his typical suffering together with Christ: "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5). And us? The thief, not to say Job, represents us. If we are truly co- crucified with Christ, the basic elements of our faith will not be just a dry doctrinal skeleton. The coming of the Kingdom, the doctrine of judgment and the atonement, these will be all we live for! For they were all the thief had to live for, during his hours of co- crucifixion.

It is possible that the thief had a really deep Bible knowledge. "Remember me when you come in your Kingdom" is almost certainly reference to Gen. 40:14, where Joseph desperately and pathetically asks: "But think on me when it shall be well with you...". Joseph went on to say "...here also have I done nothing that they should out me into the dungeon" (Gen. 40:15). This is very much the spirit of "This man hath done nothing amiss...". It could be that when he asks to be remembered for good, he had in mind Abigail's words: that when David returned in glory in his Kingdom, "my Lord, then remember thine handmaid". This was prefaced by her asking: "Forgive the trespass of your handmaid... a man is risen to pursue you, and to seek your soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord your God: and the souls of your enemies, them shall he sling out" (1 Sam. 25:29-31). And David's response was marvellously similar to that of the Lord to the thief: "Go up in peace to your house; see, I have hearkened to your voice, and have accepted your person" (1 Sam. 25:35). It would seem that the thief saw in David a type of the Lord, and saw in Abigail's words exactly the attitude he fain would have. And the Lord accepted this.

It is recorded in the other Gospels that both the thieves "railed on" Christ, joining in with the crowd to "cast the same in his teeth" (Mt. 27:44). We must see the words of the repentant thief in Lk. 23 against this background. There he was, knowing the truth, having fallen away, now facing his death. In his self-centeredness, he grew bitter against the one he knew to be his saviour. Despite the difficulty and pain which speaking whilst crucified involved, he made the effort to lambaste his saviour, as well as he knew how. But as he watched the Lord's silent response, sensing the deep spiritual communion with the Father which was then happening, he experienced a wave of even greater anger and remorse—this time, against himself. 'I could have made it, I could have repented, but now it's too late. I've added insult to injury, I've blasphemed and mocked my only possible saviour, in this my hour of desperate need'. So he fell silent, whilst (we may infer) the other thief kept up his insults and selfish pleas for immediate salvation. And he watched the suffering saviour, literally from the corner of his eye. Remember, the thieves were crucified next to Jesus. Indeed one wonders whether the other thief had also once been a believer when he says "Art not thou the Christ?" (Lk. 23:39 RV).

Such was the holiness, the supreme righteousness of the Lord, that the thought grew within him: 'Perhaps even now, while I've got life, I could ask for forgiveness, and a place in the Kingdom?' We can be sure that he grappled within himself with this thought, before ever presenting it verbally to Jesus. He would have seen the Lord's demeanour under trial, and the beauty and graciousness of His character and essential being must have made a deep impact upon the thief. When he speaks about Jesus having "done nothing amiss", he is repeating what he had heard hours before (Mk. 14:56); and the Lord's confident words of Mt. 24:64 were still ringing in his ears when he spoke of wanting mercy when this crucified man came again in glory to establish His Kingdom (cp. Lk. 21:42). And yet this perceptive man had just blasphemed Jesus with all the vicious vitriol he knew ("cast the same in his teeth" is the forerunner of 'a kick in the teeth'). It was supreme faith in and appreciation of the love and mercy of Christ which led him to make his request. I see the very fact he could make that request as a wonderful triumph of human faith over the weakness of human flesh when afflicted. That request was born out of a healthy fear of God. Before speaking to Jesus, he rebuked the other thief: "Don't you fear God...?" (Lk. 23:40). Appreciating the enormity of his sin, the repentant thief had come to fear God, to imagine the day of judgment and condemnation of sin. We dare to imagine the nervous tone of voice in which he then spoke to Jesus: "Lord, remember me (i.e. for good) when you come into your Kingdom" (Lk. 23:42). He was pleading for acceptance at the day of judgment, provoked to do so by a fear of God's coming judgments. This was surely a spiritual pinnacle.

The pain of his own sufferings, coupled with his close observation of the supreme holiness of Christ as he hung on the cross, had led him to appreciate his own sinfulness, and had inspired one of the greatest levels of faith in the mercy of Christ which mankind has reached. And so he received the ultimate assurance: You *will* be with me, in the Kingdom. The question of where the comma should be placed becomes irrelevant when we imagine how the Lord would have gasped for each word. There would, as it were, have been a comma between each word.

The thief was confident, in faith, that he would be heard. But how he would have hung upon every one of the quiet words which the Lord muttered in response, travelling over the few metres which separated them. "Verily I say unto thee this day: with me shalt thou be in Paradise" (Rotherham). We believe that to have been the emphasis in His words. 'Yes, I can really tell you, here and now, you will be in the Kingdom!'. Think of the spiritual ecstasy which would have come over the thief! God had caused him to triumph in Christ! He, the lowest sinner, had entered the highest rank of saints- those who have been directly assured that they will be in the Kingdom. Daniel, the disciples and Paul seem the only others in this category- along with the thief.

Crucifixion was a slow death. Mercifully, our Lord died abnormally quickly. Remember how Pilate "marvelled that he were already dead". Normally men lingered in agony for days before death. The thief lived a little longer. He would have seen Christ's death, "the lonely cry, the anguish keen"; the men taking the body from the cross. We can infer that he was still conscious when the soldiers broke his legs- if he was obviously dead, they would not have bothered. "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already..." (Jn. 19:33) seems to imply this. The reason for breaking the legs was to stop the criminal having any chance of running away. Surely, amidst the waves of his pulsating pain, he would have marvelled at the way in which Christ was truly the lamb of God, seeing that "not a bone of him (was) broken". There he was, assured of the mercy of the Lord at judgment day, hanging on the cross, in physical agony which it is hard for us to enter into. In some ways, he continues to be a type of us. Whether we are dying of cancer, crippled with arthritis, emotionally trapped in a painful relationship, chained to a demanding job, we too can have every assurance of the Lord's mercy. "To him that overcomes", He has promised the paradise of the Kingdom, just as He did to the thief.

But like the repentant thief, our mind must be full of the vision of our dying saviour, triumphing in His holiness, freely confessing our sin and the justice of God's condemnation of it, thrilling with the certainty of our

Hope- of being in the Kingdom with Christ. Not for the repentant thief the increasing bitterness of the other man. As his bitterness grew, so the serenity and hope, and anticipation and joyful expectancy of the Kingdom rapidly increased for our crucified brother. The bitterness and disillusion of the world should not be ours, as the pain rages within and around us. Ours should be the strength and (somehow, amidst it all) *peace* of Christ's example. And the thief is alluded to later on in the NT as a symbol of us all. The Lord's promise to him that he would 'be with him' is the very language of 2 Cor. 5:8 and 1 Thess. 4:17 about us all.

*And they divided up his clothes by casting lots-* Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide. The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

23:44 *And it was now about the sixth hour; and a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour-* The way the sun was eclipsed at the Lord's death is recorded in terms which clearly contrast with the prevailing view that at the demise of the emperors, the light of the sun was eclipsed. Both Plutarch (Caesar, 69.4) and Josephus (*Antiquities* 14.12.3,409) speak of eclipses of the sun at the death of Julius Caesar. The Lord Jesus in His death is thus being proclaimed as the true Caesar. Likewise Cassius Dio *History* 51.17.5) claims that at the fall of Alexandria

to the Romans, "the disembodied spirits of the dead were made visible". Similar claims were made for other Roman victories. And yet this is clearly put into context by the record that around the Lord's victory, the graves were opened and the dead actually came forth.

*23:45 The sun's light failing; and the veil of the temple was torn in the middle-* The way into the most holy was now open to all, the veil torn from top to bottom because this was done by God. The High Priest's garments had been torn by him, and now the veil itself was open. Judaism was effectively over. Direct fellowship with God was now made possible through the Lord's death. We note by contrast how the same word is used to describe how the Lord's garment was *not* rent (Jn. 19:24). The rending of the veil is clearly alluded to in Heb. 9:3; 10:19; but as noted there, we must have boldness to enter in to the holiest. We all now are to act as the High Priest, going into the very presence of God for the same of others.

*23:46 And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said: Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. And having said this, he breathed his last-* These were the final words of the Lord Jesus. It must surely be significant that this final statement addresses God as "Father", just as the first of His seven last sayings did ("Father forgive them"). He used the same title in His agony in the garden (Lk. 22:42; Mt. 26:39,42,44). Putting those four passages together we can visualize the prostrate figure: "Father... Father... Father... Father". Evidently the Fatherhood of God was something which the Lord found extremely appealing and comforting. We have seen that if we place the seven last sayings of Christ chronologically, we find that the number of words Christ uttered runs 12-9-4-3-1-1-8. We have suggested that this indicates that Christ found speaking increasingly difficult on the cross. This final cry therefore involved supreme effort, every word was meaningful, and surely our Lord intended us to closely meditate upon the implication of every valuable word He uttered here.

There can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus was not just saying something like 'Well, that's it, my life force is going back to you, Father'. We need to pause for a moment to consider exactly what we mean by the spirit of man. It is perfectly true that often, the spirit refers to the life force and / or the mind, and the soul refers to the physical body. However, this is not true in every case. Sometimes the soul basically means 'you / me, the whole person in every sense'. The soul and spirit are therefore interchangeable in this sense. The spirit / mind *is* the fundamental person, the soul, in that sense. The spirit which returns to God does not *always* refer to merely the life force; it can refer to the mind and personality too. Likewise the Spirit of God is not just naked power, but power that expresses His Spirit / mind. When the Lord Jesus commended His Spirit to the Father, He was offering Him not just the life force which

is in every animal and plant, but His character and personality too, the result of the supreme spiritual effort made throughout His life.

The Lord Jesus *commended* His spirit to the Father's hands. The Greek translated "commend" means literally to place beside, to lay down beside. The Lord Jesus had a sense that His character would not be forgotten by the Father, it would take its place beside the Father as it were, as He later would physically. This is not, of course, to give any support to the notion of disembodied spirits. Existence can only be in an animate, bodily sense. Yet the word "commend" in the Greek does suggest that Christ felt that the place He would soon take beside the Father was due to the fact that His spirit / mind had found acceptance with Him first. The Father's hands no doubt is an idiom for His care, His preservation (cp. Mt. 4:6). Christ was taking comfort in the fact that His character, those endless minutes of spiritual effort, of struggle to develop and preserve a spiritual mind, would surely not be forgotten, it would be preserved in the Father's hands.

We can go too far in reacting against the apostate dogma of the immortality of the soul. Whilst this is an evidently false doctrine, it is equally untrue that the Father forgets His children between the point they die and the resurrection. Therefore God thinks of Abraham as if he is still alive, speaking of "those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:16,17). God is the God of Abraham here and now, even though Abraham is dead and unconscious, because "he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all (His people) live unto him" (Lk. 20:36,37). Because the dead are unconscious, because our memories of them fade and distort, we tend to think subconsciously (and even doctrinally, according to some lectures on the state of the dead) that this is how God too sees the dead saints. But "all live unto him", the souls under the altar cry out to Him for vengeance; in other words, His constant, detailed awareness of their characters provokes Him to act in world affairs even now (Rev. 6:9; 20:4). The Heavenly Jerusalem with which we are associated in Christ is composed of "the spirits (characters) of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). As we strive to develop a spiritual character now, our spirit becomes associated with those pleasing characters ("spirits") who reached a level of spiritual completion ("perfection") and were then absorbed into God's consciousness.

The hands of God are also connected with the Angels, the means by which God performs His actions. Moses' hands being upheld by the hands of others can be seen as a type of the Lord Jesus being sustained by Angelic hands on the cross, connecting with the Messianic prophecy of Gen. 49:24 concerning the hands of Messiah being strengthened for His mediation by the hands of God. Throughout Scripture, God's hands are

associated with His creative work in the natural creation (e.g. Ps. 8:6; 95:5; Heb. 1:10)- work which was and is performed through the Angels. The Lord Jesus was aware of the Angels in His final agony; He was painfully aware that they were at His command to lessen the physical torment (Mt. 26:53). And yet He seems to have felt their absence when He complained that His God (His Angel?) had forsaken Him- or so He felt. Perhaps He felt that His spirit / mind was not being taken care of by them, that His mental being was being placed beside the Father, in the company of the surrounding Angels. Our struggle to remain aware of Angelic presence in the midst of intense pain and trial should surely be inspired by this; in His very last words, our Lord was demonstrating His awareness of His relationship to the Angels, and His belief that although they seemed so distant from Him in His agony, yet surely He believed that ultimately they would take care of Him.

There were several times in the Lord's ministry when He chose to escape from death. This adds significance to the fact that finally the Lord gave up His life rather than having it taken from Him. By His Divine power, He passed through the crowd who sought to throw Him over a cliff (Lk. 4:29). Several times the Lord withdrew from an area that opposed Him because He knew they sought to kill Him (Mk. 3:7; 7:24; 9:30; Jn. 4:1-3; 7:1-9; 10:40); and He almost goes into hiding from His persecutors for a while until the final reappearance in Jerusalem (Jn. 11:54). What all this means is that He could likewise have avoided His final death; but He chose not to, and in this sense He willingly gave His life rather than had it taken from Him. The death of human beings can be seen as a result of physical processes over which they have no control. They are killed, often against their will, or disease takes hold of them and eventually forces them to a point where they breathe their last. There is never a conscious giving up of the last breath as an act of the will. Death either occurs in a state of semi-consciousness or unexpectedly, in a moment. We usually, in the final analysis, cling to life at all costs, throwing our feeble best into the fight we have no chance to win. Truly did Dylan Thomas observe that men do not "go gentle into that good night" but "rage, rage against the dying of the light". The death of the Lord Jesus Christ was altogether different- and the death of the thieves next to Him would have highlighted this. It is so often emphasized that He *gave* His life for us:

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" in itself suggests that the death of Christ was an act of the will

Christ gave His flesh for us (Jn. 6:51)

Moses and Elijah spoke of the cross as "the Exodus which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:31)- He would accomplish it to Himself, the Greek suggests.

The breaking of bread (a highly conscious act) recalls how Christ gave His body for us (Lk. 22:19)

Christ's death was the result of His obedience to God's command to die on a cross (Phil. 2:8)

Christ poured out His soul unto death as a conscious act performed to enable our redemption (Is. 53:12). Materially, this may refer to the way in which every respiration of the Lord would have scraped His sensitive skin against the rough wood, so that there would have been constant blood flow from His back. This was sometimes a cause of death through crucifixion: blood loss through repeated agitation of the wounds by lifting up the body to breathe and exhale. In this sense He poured out His soul unto death. Muscle cramps would have tended to fix the muscles and make respiration difficult without a wilful yanking of the body weight upwards on the wounded nerves.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13)

The Lord was at great pains to emphasize this aspect of His death, saying the same thing time and again: " I lay down my life for the sheep...therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life...no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself...this commandment have I received of my Father" (Jn. 10:15-18).

The death of Christ was therefore a conscious act of giving, it was not simply a result of being murdered by the Jews or Roman soldiers. No man took Christ's life from Him, He laid it down of Himself, i.e. of His own will. It is therefore apparent that Christ's death was not solely a physical result of being impaled on the stake. The fact He died abnormally quickly is proof enough of this. And it explains why the centurion when he saw how the Lord so cried out was by this fact persuaded that He was the Son of God (Mk. 15:39). That last outbreathing, that death as an act of the will, was something phenomenal. We are therefore driven to the conclusion that Christ was in a position to give His life at a certain point in time chosen by Himself. "He poured out his *soul* unto death" (Is. 53:12) suggests that the actual point of His death was a result of mental activity within the mind of the Lord Jesus. He was the servant who "*makes himself* an offering for sin" (Is. 53:10). Physically this would be explicable by the way in which His life of intense physical and mental trauma had resulted in Him coming to an early death, quite probably through heart-related problems. "My *soul* is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Mt. 26:38) suggests that the mental agony in the garden almost killed the Lord Jesus. Such was the intensity of His mind in His final suffering for us. Such was His awareness of our need, of the problem of our sins, and the majesty of God's righteousness. In the physical agony of crucifixion, it was only His will to live which kept Him alive. He was therefore able to keep Himself alive until He had said what He wanted to, and then He was able to consciously give His life for our sins, to offer *Himself*, as both sacrifice and priest, to the Heavenly Sanctuary. This means that Christ did not just hang on the stake waiting to die, and the process of death was mercifully speeded up by the Father. Every moment there was necessary for the perfecting of His character, making Him perfect through suffering,

and once He knew He had reached that point of total spiritual completeness, He was able to give up His life as a conscious act of love for us and sacrificial dedication to the Father. The strength of will power which enabled Him to give up His life force at a specific time is something to be marvelled at. Occasionally we glimpse it in His ministry; the way He sent the people away, walked through the crowds who wanted to kill Him (Lk. 4:30; Jn. 8:59; 10:39), spellbound His would-be arresters, "suffered no man to follow him" (Mk. 5:37)- His strength of will and personality shines through.

The Lord Jesus 'commended' His spirit to the Father. The Greek *paratithemi* means literally to place or lay down beside. *Tithemi* is the same word translated "lay down" when we read of Christ laying down His life for us. It is the word used to describe the palsied man being laid down at the feet of Jesus (Lk. 5:18), or the laying of a foundation stone (1 Cor. 3:11). It is also translated to bow down. The point at which Christ laid down His life, bowing down before the Father, was therefore when He commended His spirit to the Father. When Christ "*yielded up* the spirit" (Mt. 27:50), He was commending His spirit to God, laying down His life for us. The Greek for "yielded up" is *para-didomi*, to yield or give beside, and is evidently related in meaning to *para-tithemi*, to commend, to lay down beside.

So the idea of Christ *giving* Himself for us therefore refers to that final moment of giving up, yielding, laying down His breath for us. Paul was evidently moved by this; he marvelled at how Christ "*gave himself* for me" (Gal. 2:20), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 concerning him giving up His spirit. And we can enter into that sense or marvel and wonder. Paul again alludes to this in Eph. 5:2: "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath *given himself* for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour". And therefore, Paul goes on, fornication, covetousness, foolish talking etc. should not even be *named* amongst us, "but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:3,4). That wondrous moment when Christ reached such self-control as to give His life for us, to breathe out His last breath for us as an act of the will, that moment was evidently deep within the mind of Paul. Because of it we should find ample inspiration to "walk in love" towards each other, to be so full of praise for this that we have no time to even speak about the sins to which are earthly nature is so prone. These are high ideals indeed, yet in Paul (another sin-stricken human) they began to be realized. They *really can* be realized in our lives, we truly can begin to appreciate the intensity of that yielding up, that laying down of the life spirit of our Lord Jesus- and therefore and thereby we will find the inspiration to respond in a life of true love for each other.

The same word crops up later in the chapter: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and *gave himself* for it" (Eph. 5:25). Now

this is high, heavenly, indeed. Husbands are asked to consider the intensity of that moment when Christ, rigid with self-control, gave up His life for us, breathing His last as a controlled act of the will. And the Spirit through Paul asks husbands to reflect this in their daily lives, in the petty day by day situation of life. No wonder he asks wives to deeply respect their husbands if they at least try to rise up to this spirit (Eph. 5:33). Real meditation upon the implications of all this, the very height of the challenge, will surely do more good to a marriage than any amount of counselling and reading of human words.

Another thought arises from Eph. 5:25,26. The Lord *gave Himself* for us in that final breath, "*that* he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing (laver, baptismal bath) of water by the word". This is the language of Tit. 3:5 concerning baptism and spiritual regeneration. Is it too much to believe that the Lord in His final moments had visions of men and women being baptized into His triumphant death, being regenerated by His Spirit / word, and thereby being saved?

The Father loved the Son *because* He laid down His life in this way; there was an upwelling of love within the soul of Almighty God as He beheld it (Jn. 10:17). And ditto for all those who try to enter into the spirit of laying down their lives after the pattern of our Lord's final moment. But well before His death, our Lord could speak of how "I lay down my life" (Jn. 10:17); His whole life was a laying down of His innermost spirit, His final outbreathing was a summation of His daily attitude. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). In this same vein, Ps. 69:8,9 is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet these verses are elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry. And "they hated me without a cause" (Ps. 69:4) was true throughout the Lord's life (Jn. 15:25) as well as particularly in His death. The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life.

The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he died... the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person.

When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him.

That we should be called to imitate our Lord in this should truly fill us with a sense of highness, that we should be called to such a high challenge. 1 Jn. 3:16 takes us even further in this wondrous story: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he *laid down* His life for us: and we ought to *lay down* our lives for the brethren". So intensely was God in Christ on the cross that in a sense He too laid down His life for us, He bowed down for us, laid Himself before our feet as that palsied man was laid before (same word) Jesus. In that final cry from the cross we perceive God's love for us. We perceive the humility of God, fantastic concept that that is. No wonder then that we should lay down our lives for each other. No wonder than that we *must* achieve a true humility in service to each other. Christ (and God, in Him) laid down His life for us while we were yet sinners. We too, therefore, should not be put off from laying down our lives for each other because we feel our brethren are spiritually weak. This is the very essence of laying down our lives for each other; we are to replicate the laying down of the life of Christ for us *while we were weak* in our giving of our innermost being for our weak brethren. We are truly at the very boundary of human words to express these things. We must, we *must* respond in practice. And the wonder of it all is that in this final, supreme moment of self-giving, the Lord was identifying with apostate Israel, of whom it had been prophesied: "She hath given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed" (Jer. 15:9- all crucifixion language).

It seems likely that Peter was at the cross, and therefore his letters are packed with allusions to it. What he saw there had a lifelong impact upon him. He makes at least two allusions to the words of Christ on the cross, and bids us enter the spirit of it. "Hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps... who... when he suffered, threatened not; but *committed himself* to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:21-23). This is the same word as used about Christ commending His spirit to God in that final agony. *We are bidden enter His example and follow Him*. Christ overcame the temptation to react wrongly to His sufferings by *instead* committing Himself to God. This idea of laying Himself down for us was what enabled Him not to get bitter. The antidote to our own bitterness is likewise to enter this spirit of laying down our lives.

1 Pet. 4:13-19 likewise invites us to enter into Christ's final sufferings: "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings... let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer (cp. the two thieves next to Jesus on the cross)... yet if any man suffer as a Christian (i.e. with Christ), let him not be ashamed (as Christ "despised the shame" on the cross, Heb. 12:2) ...wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God (as Christ did, Acts 2:23; Is. 53:10; Lk. 22:22) *commit* the keeping of their souls (same word as Christ *commending* His spirit to God) to him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator". *We are bidden enter His example and follow Him*. I want to stress this point. The sufferings of Christ are so deep that we can shy away from them, gaping in incomprehension at the records without grasping this sense that we are invited to enter in to them. It has been suggested that since the Lord's last words were "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit", His first words on resurrecting would have been a continuation of the Psalm 31:5 which He had quoted: "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth". But this verse was the usual evening prayer of Jews in the first century. It could well be that the Lord had prayed those words every evening of His mortal life, and said the rest of the verse each time He awoke. In this we see yet again that the cross was a living out of patterns and attitudes which He had already developed during His life. It also needs to be noted that David didn't say Ps. 31:5 on his deathbed, but rather it was an expression of his desire to commit his soul to the Father in gratefulness and praise. There was something of this in the mind of Jesus at His end.

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23:47 *And when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying: Certainly, this was a righteous man-* He said it twice: "This was a righteous man (Lk.), "truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: "And I've crucified him". The Lord died through an act of utter self-control; consciously breathing out His last breath in the form of the words "Father into your hands I commit my spirit". He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18).

23:48 *And all the crowds that came together to this sight, when they saw the things that were done, returned, striking their breasts-* Contemplation of the death of the Lord Jesus is intended to stimulate our self-examination and self-knowledge. Those who saw it "smote upon their breasts" (Lk. 23:48), an idiom only used elsewhere for true penitence and realization of personal sinfulness (Lk. 18:13). See on Mt. 27:5. The whole structure of the records of the crucifixion are to emphasize how the cross is essentially about human response to it; nothing else elicits from humanity a response like the cross does. People 'beheld... the sight' (Lk. 23:48) - the verb *theoreo* and the noun *theoria* here suggest that people

'theorized', what they saw inevitably made them think out a response. See on Mk. 15:33.

The disciples kept changing the subject whenever the Lord started speaking about His death. As He hung in ultimate triumph and suffering on the cross, men came and looked, and turned away again (Is. 53:3; Lk. 23:48). The spiritual intensity of it couldn't be sustained in their minds, as it cannot easily be in ours. The more we break bread, the more we try to reconstruct Golgotha's awful scene, the more we realize this.

Those who beheld the cross "beat their breasts", Luke records. The only other occurrence of this phrase is again in Luke, concerning how the desperate, sin-convicted publican likewise beat his breast before God in contrition (18:13). Does this not suggest that those breast-beaters were doing so because "that sight" convicted them of their own sinfulness? Their "return" to their homes uses the Greek word usually translated 'to repent'. The cross inspired their repentance. The records of the crucifixion are framed to focus upon the response of individuals to the cross. The response of those who beat their breasts is very similar to that of the Centurion:

Centurion	Crowds
Having seen	Having observed
Happening	Happenings
Was glorifying	Returned / repented
Saying	Striking breasts

The parallel is between his glorifying God, and their returning / repenting. The need for repentance is a strong theme in Luke (10:13; 11:32; 13:3,5; 15:7,10; 16:30; 17:3,4)- as if he perceived that the ultimate motivation to repentance was in the cross. The apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* 4.5 claims that "all the crowds who were gathered together for the observation of this...returned striking their breasts and weeping awful tears". And yet the record of the cross also leads to faith, not only conviction of our desperation (Jn. 19:35, "these things" = the record of the cross).

Appreciation of the cross will create unity between us; a common sense of failure, and yet also a common appreciation of the utter grace which we have been invited to behold and actually taste of. "All the people that *came together* to that sight" (Lk. 23:48) uses a word which really means to bond together in close association. This is the effect of the cross. Those

who stared in wonder, yearning for a deeper appreciation, were somehow bound together by their experience of the cross.

The people 'coming together to that sight' might imply that the crowd which was milling around came clustering around the cross once the Lord uttered His final cries and so evidently died. The women also beheld His dead corpse from afar. This seems to be encouraging us to imagine the picture of the Lord just at that point; the dead body on the cross, the victory achieved. It was only at this stage that the curse of Dt. 21 came into effect: "cursed (Heb. a curse; the Hebrew is *always* translated this way) is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Dt. 21:22,23). These words have been misunderstood as meaning that the Lord as a living being was under one of the Law's curses of condemnation. This cannot be. It must be remembered that crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish method. The Deuteronomy passage was not written with reference to crucifixion, but rather to the custom of displaying the already dead body of a sinner on a pole as a witness and warning (cp. the display of Saul's body). Sin brought the curse; and so every sinful person who died for their sin was bearing the curse of God. They were to be buried quickly as a sign of God taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Lord died the death of a sinner; He bore our sins, and therefore our curse (Gal. 3:13,14). Every condemned sinner whose body had been displayed had been a type of the sinless Son of God. He was exhibited there for one or two hours (until Joseph got the permission to take the body), totally, totally united with sinful man. And then, because God had no pleasure in this condemnation of sin, the body was taken and buried. Smiting the breast connects with the sinner smiting his breast in repentance (Mt. 11:17 RVmg.). The thoughts of many hearts are revealed by meditation on the cross (Lk. 2:35). It leads us to repentance. The prophecy that the Jews would look on His they pierced and mourn in repentance may have had an incipient fulfilment at the crucifixion.

*23:49 And all his acquaintances, and the women that had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching these things-* The connection is between following the Lord in the easier times, at the height of His popularity in Galilee; and also following Him when all seems hopeless, and there seems absolutely no human advantage from identity with Him. Mark's reference to "many" women coming up to Jerusalem in support of Him would suggest that He may have had more female supporters than male. John says that the women were standing at the cross. To show such sympathy for the crucified could lead to their own arrest and crucifixion. They were perhaps asked by the Lord to draw back from Him. Or perhaps they are pictured here just before they summoned the courage to walk out across the no man's land between the crowd and the cross, to show their open devotion to the Lord.

It was only close family members who could beg for the body of the crucified. The way Joseph of Arimathaea is described as doing this is juxtaposed straight after the description of the Lord's natural family standing afar off from Him (Lk. 23:49,52). The effect of the cross had brought forth a new family in that the Lord had now broken all His natural ties, not least with His beloved mother.

*23:50 And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man-* He was 'also' a disciple (Mt.), in God's eyes, in the same category as the women disciples who were so public about their discipleship (Mt. 27:56). Whilst secret discipleship is not the Lord's intention, and He will arrange circumstances so that we 'come out' publicly, it is not for us to say that He doesn't count secret disciples as also His disciples, just as He did Joseph.

*23:51 (He had not consented to their decision and deed), a man of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews, who was looking for the kingdom of God-* The entire Sanhedrin had unanimously agreed to the deed, but Joseph's internal lack of agreement was noted by the Father and this apparently weak man now comes out openly, and is spoken of so highly in the inspired record.

*23:52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus-* Remember that it was only close family members who could beg for the body of the crucified.

Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

The text records that the Jews desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and "the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph "was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it

seems this was a position held within his own conscience; indeed, "many" of the elders actually believed in Jesus (Jn. 12:42). It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. "You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which "all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55). They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre".

They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

John gives the additional detail about the concern that Jesus might not be fully dead, and the piercing of His side. It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. " He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

*23:53 And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where never man had yet been laid-* Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. He identified himself with the crucified Lord, and laid Him where his own body should be laid. He lived out the essence of baptism. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate "commanded the body to be delivered", implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a

tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as "honourable", literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasize his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. "He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The phobia for cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

*23:54 And it was the day of the preparation; and the Sabbath drew on-* Businesses would have been closing. John records that Joseph bought a huge amount of spices, more than what was used to bury the Caesars. The cost would have been huge. To raise the cash he would surely have needed to capitalize his own possessions. And he did all this as business was closing. He gave all in response to the Lord's death, without, it seems, any hope of future personal reward or resurrection.

*23:55 And the women, who had come with him out of Galilee, followed and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid-* It is worth putting together two passages, both from Luke: "The women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after..." (Lk. 23:55); and Acts 13:30,31: "God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses". Surely Paul and Luke have in mind here the ministering women. They had followed from Galilee to Jerusalem, the risen Lord had appeared to a woman first of all, and now those women were witnessing to the people. Perhaps 1 Cor. 15:3-7 is relevant here, where we read that the Lord appeared after His resurrection to the twelve, and yet on another occasion to "all the apostles"- perhaps referring to the group that included the women. An empty tomb was no proof that Jesus of Nazareth had risen- unless there were witnesses there present at that empty tomb who could testify also that it was in that very tomb that Jesus had been laid. And only women, not men, were witnesses of this. The Greek world placed great emphasis upon sight- "Eyes are surer witnesses than ears", Heraclitus said. They related to the past visually; for a group of people to be eyewitnesses was considered conclusive. Hence the enormous significance of the way in which the Gospels repeatedly make the women the subjects of verbs of seeing (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:49,55). They were the eyewitnesses.

The women who stood afar off and watched in helplessness and

hopelessness and lack of comprehension *also followed* the Lord (:49) and ministered to Him in the Galilee days. Their standing there like that was still reckoned to them as active following and ministry to Him. They also serve, who merely stand and wait.

*23:56 And they returned and prepared spices and ointments. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment-* The point is surely that this was the last Sabbath which needed to be kept. For the Lord's death had now ended the old covenant, the veil had been torn down. But they were ignorant of all that, and yet they were still loyally committed to the Lord Jesus, despite lacking full understanding. This is both comfort to ourselves, and also a lesson in tolerance towards others who likewise misunderstand aspects of the Lord's sacrifice but still love Him.

## CHAPTER 24

24:1 *And on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared-* The language hints very much at a new creation beginning. And yet it began in darkness, not only literally, but also in the darkness of the disciples' disappointment, misunderstanding and weak faith. From all this, great light was to arise.

Mary came seeking the Lord early in the morning... and this inevitably takes our minds to some OT passages which speak of doing just this:

- "O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory" (Ps. 63:1,2). The resurrection of Jesus showed clearly both the power (2 Cor. 13:4) and glory (Rom. 6:4) of the Father. For Mary, life without her Lord was a dry and thirsty land. This was why she went to the grave early that morning. She was simply aching for Him. And she had well learnt the Lord's teaching, that her brother's resurrection had been associated with the glory of the Father (Jn. 11:40). She went early to the tomb to seek the Father's glory- so the allusion to Ps. 63 implies. She was the one person who had actually believed in advance the Lord's teaching about resurrection. And yet even she was confused- half her brain perceived it all and believed it, and was rewarded by being the first to see the risen Lord; and yet another part of her brain was simply overcome with grief, believing that the gardener had somehow removed the body some place else. And our own highest heights of spiritual perception are likewise shrouded by such humanity too.

- "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Prov. 8:17) is written in the first instance of wisdom. And yet the Lord Jesus has "wisdom" as one of His titles (Mt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 1:24,30). Mary sat at the Lord's feet to hear His wisdom; to her, she showed in practice what it means to comprehend Jesus as "the wisdom of God". She anxiously heard His words. And thus she sought Him early...because she so wanted to hear His wisdom again. Of course, she loved Him. But that love was rooted in respect and almost an addiction to His wisdom. It was this that she loved about Him, and it was this which led her to the grave early. And it was this which led her to the honour of being the first to see the risen Jesus.

- "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Is. 26:8,9) makes the same connection between seeking the Lord early, and loving His words.

24:2 *And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb-* The Angel

descended and did this before the women arrived; for on the way, they had worried about how they would roll the stone away, but when they got there, they found it done already (Mk. 16:2,4). Women unable to roll away a stone recalls the scene when Rachel and her girls were unable to roll the stone away from the well until Jacob did it (Gen. 29:3,10). The idea would therefore be that the Lord's tomb was in fact a well of living water which would flow for God's people after and on account of His resurrection; and this idea is elsewhere stated specifically by the Lord in John's Gospel.

24:3 *And they entered in, and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus-* The first reference to "the Lord Jesus"; His resurrection declared Him as Lord and Christ. They had observed where the body was laid, and so their surprise is the more understandable.

24:4 *And it came to pass, while they were wondering about this, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel-* Their "wondering" was reflective of their lack of faith and understanding, and they are gently rebuked for it in :5. They should have assumed that now on the third day, His body indeed would not be there as He had predicted. We get the impression that this was the first time they had seen the Angels; the Angel sitting on the stone in Mt. 28:2 was therefore invisible to them, and his words to them of Mt. 28:5 were perhaps at this point, rather than at the point of entry into the tomb.

24:5 *And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them: Why do you seek the living among the dead?-* The women had come to anoint the Lord's dead body, with apparently no expectation that He would indeed rise the third day as He had predicted. And yet the Angel generously counts this to them (Mt. 'I know / perceive / accept / count it') as if they were actively looking for Jesus. Their obvious error- that they assumed Him to still be dead- is not rebuked because the good news is simply so much greater. The resurrection records are full of such imputed righteousness. Lk. 24:5 enquires why they are 'seeking the living amongst the dead'. They were not seeking the living- they had come to anoint a dead body. Yet they are graciously counted as seeking Jesus as if they were seeking for a living person. John's record has the Lord asking Mary *whom* she is 'seeking', and this is how John's Gospel opens, with the Lord enquiring of His followers *whom* they were seeking (Jn. 1:38; 20:15). This question as to the Lord's identity echoes down to us, for we too can feel a devotion and identity with the idea of 'Jesus' without perceiving that He really is alive and active. The Lord counted righteousness to them, they are commended by the Angels for 'seeking the Lord'- even though that

seeking was deep in their subconscious. Yet the record notices that even incipient faith and understanding in those women, and counts it to them. Would that we would be so generous in our perception of others. The weeping, helpless standing afar off at the cross are described as still following the Lord Jesus and ministering to Him, as they did in the happier Galilee days (Mk. 15:41). Their essential spirit was understood and credited to them, even though their actions seemed to belie this. Likewise our essential desires are read as our prayers, even if the words we use seem quite different.

Meetings with two separate Angels didn't make the women understand; now two Angels appear together and tell them the same words as the other Angels had said.

24:6 *He is not here, but is risen! Remember in what way he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee-* After He rose, the Angels pointed out this sense to His men: "...remember *how* [the Greek sense is: 'with what urgency'] he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man *must* be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:6,7 AV). Like us, they heard and saw the compulsion, that Messianic *must*, but didn't really appreciate it. The Lord was no fatalist, simply reflecting that what was to be 'must' be. Rather He meant that it 'must' be and therefore He strove to fulfil it. There was no fatalistic compulsion about the cross- for He need not have gone through with it. But He 'must' do so for the sake of that indescribable compulsion to save us, to glorify Yahweh's Name, which He felt within Him. He reminded the two on the way to Emmaus: "*Ought* [s.w. 'must'] *not* Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). And consider Heb. 2:17: "Wherefore in all things it *behoved him* to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people". It was in His death that the Lord's blood acted as a reconciliation for the sins of the people- an evident reference to the ritual of the day of atonement, which the same writer shows spoke so eloquently of the cross. And yet he was "behoved" to do this, it was an obligation He felt intrinsic within His very being. The same word occurs later: "And by reason hereof he *ought*, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man takes this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ..." (Heb. 5:3-5). See on Mk. 14:49.

24:7- see on Mt. 27:26.

*Saying that the Son of Man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again-* The Angels quoted the Lord's words, perhaps because they had been watching and listening

to Him throughout His ministry. The reference seems to specifically be to the Lord's words of Mk. 9:31, which the disciples had not understood because of their own obsession with who should be the greatest.

*24:8 And they remembered his words-* if the reference is to Mk. 9:31-35, they would have recalled how their lack of belief in and understanding of the Lord's words was because of their own obsession with who was to be the greatest amongst them.

*24:9 And returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the others-* Mk. 16:7,8 says that initially their fear was so great that they were resolved not to tell anyone anything, i.e. to be disobedient to the commission to tell their brethren the good news. And so according to Matthew the Lord Himself intervenes to urge them to go tell their brethren.

*24:10 Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles-* Most of the references to Joanna occur within Luke's writings, and the central placement given to her in the passage in Lk. 24:9,10. It would seem that Luke had an especial interest in chronicling the women who went with Jesus- his material accounts for two of the four parables that feature women (Lk. 15:8-10; 18:1-14), and he has seven passages / incidents where women are central (Lk. 7:11-17, 36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 11:27,28; 13:10-17; 23:27-31). And it is Luke alone who gives the impression that the Lord was not followed around Palestine by twelve men alone, but by a further group of ministering women. See on Lk. 8:2.

*24:11 And these words appeared in their sight as idle talk, and they disbelieved them-* There is a strong theme in the Gospels that the disciples repeatedly disbelieved the news of the resurrection. And yet they were appealing for people to believe the message of the Lord's resurrection and be baptized into it. But they made that appeal on the basis of their own weakness and slowness to believe. "Idle talk" means literally the talk of the crazy. They assumed this was a story of the once demon-possessed Mary Magdalene, an outcome of her previous mental disturbance. When the Lord had so clearly foretold His resurrection. Luke is pointing out their own disbelief, implying it was almost to the point of blasphemy.

Each of the Gospel writers brings out a sense of inadequacy about themselves or the disciples, this self-criticism, in different ways. Luke's account of the rich man in the parable of Lk. 16 has several consciously-inserted connections with how he later describes the disciples:

**Lk. 16**

**Lk. 24**

Disbelief in the face of meeting the resurrected man (Lk. 16:31)	"They did not believe...slow of heart to believe" (Lk. 24:11,25,41)
Double mention of Moses and the prophets as proofs of resurrection (Lk. 16:29,31)	Ditto in Lk. 24:27,44
"Should rise from the dead" (Lk. 16:31)	"Should rise from the dead" (Lk. 24:46)
"They will repent" (Lk. 16:30)	Forgiveness of sins was to be preached because of Christ's resurrection, as Luke brings out in Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20.

Thus the tragedy and foolishness of the rich man in the parable is seen by Luke as applying to the disciples in their disbelief of the resurrection. And yet the purpose of Luke's Gospel, as all the Gospels, was to proclaim the need for belief in the resurrection.

*24:12 But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; and stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he departed to his home, wondering about what had happened-* Peter and John went to the tomb after having first of all disbelieved Mary Magdalene (Lk. 24:11). "Myrrh...glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead" (Leon Morris, *John* p. 736). The fact the cloths were neatly placed as they were was therefore a powerful evidence that the Lord had risen, and not been extricated from the cloths by any human effort.

The various records all use the same word for how Peter, John and Mary all 'stooped down' (Jn. 20:5,11) at this time; as if bowing before the resurrected Lord.

*24:13 And two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty furlongs from Jerusalem-* Seven miles would have taken just over two hours to walk. The conversation would likely not have been very long, as the Lord was not walking with them the whole time. One of them was Cleopas (:18); and it could be assumed from :34 that the other was Peter, although perhaps an unrecorded appearance to Peter is there referred to. However I prefer to think this Cleopas is the same "Clopas" of Jn. 19:25 whose wife Mary stood by the cross. The other unnamed disciple would then refer to Mary his wife.

*24:14 And they discussed with each other about all the things which had happened-* "Happened" translates a Greek word which means literally 'to

walk together', just as they were doing; the idea is that they recognized that there was a meeting together of various threads, and they were struggling to understand what all the coincidences meant. The Lord had plainly stated His death and resurrection, and this alone made sense of the things they were noticing; but they failed to make the obvious connections. It was only when the Lord 'walked with them' that everything became clear.

*24:15 And it came to pass, while they talked and questioned together, that Jesus himself drew near and went with them-* As noted on :14, there is a play on ideas here. Whilst they perceived how the various recent events 'walked together', the Lord Himself walked together with them. The lively intellectual dialogue suggested by "talked and questioned together" was likely between Cleopas and his wife Mary (see on :13); a great pattern for Christian marriage.

*24:16 But their eyes were kept from recognizing him-* It seems that the eyes of the women were likewise kept from seeing the Angel seated on the stone in Mt. 27:2. The blinding and opening of eyes is typically in response to whether a person themselves wishes to open or close their eyes. They did not perceive the Lord because they didn't want to; and were confirmed in that attitude. "Kept" is too mild; the Greek is usually used of violent 'taking hold' or arrest of a person, especially of the Lord Jesus and His preachers by the Jews. perhaps we are to assume that it was the Jewish mindset which likewise had taken hold of their mental outlook and was stopping them from seeing the obvious fulfilment of the Lord's words.

*24:17 And he said to them: What communications are these you have one with another as you walk? And they stood still, looking sad-* Being challenged with this question stopped them in their tracks. And the Lord so often used, and uses, questions- in order to likewise stop us in our tracks, as we come to self-realization. The Lord's questions were rhetorical, because He wanted to elicit self-understanding. "Looking sad" is a word only found elsewhere about the Jewish orthodox in Mt. 6:16. As noted on :16, their eyes, their worldview and outlook, were influenced by them, they looked like them; and so refused to perceive the Lord.

*24:18 And one of them, named Cleopas, answering said to him: Do you live alone in Jerusalem, and therefore do not know the things which have happened there recently?-* The zeal of Mary to be an obedient witness is remarkable. All Jerusalem knew the story of the risen Jesus still on "the third day" after His death- only someone totally cut off from society would have not heard this news, as Cleopas commented (Lk. 24:18 Gk.). If the whole of Jerusalem knew the story about the resurrected Jesus on the third day after His death, and the male disciples were evidently still

nervous and doubtful about everything, it must be that this tremendous spread of the news had been achieved by Mary and the women.

Even after His resurrection, in His moment of glory and triumph, the Lord appeared in very ordinary working clothes, so that He appeared as a gardener. The disciples who met Him on the Emmaus road asked whether He 'lived alone' and therefore was ignorant of the news of the city about the death of Jesus (Lk. 24:18 RV). The only people who lived alone, outside of the extended family, were drop outs or weirdos. It was almost a rude thing for them to ask a stranger. The fact was, the Lord appeared so very ordinary, even like a lower class social outcast type. And this was the exalted Son of God. We gasp at His humility, but also at His earnest passion to remind His followers of their common bond with Him, even in His exaltation.

*24:19 And he said to them: What things? And they told him the things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, that he was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people-* So often, if not always, the Lord's questions are to elicit self knowledge from us. "The things concerning Jesus..." is a term Luke's record will later use as a definition of the Gospel (Acts 8:12; 19:8). And the Lord will go on to expound to them "the things concerning" Himself (:27). But they knew these "things concerning" Him. They knew, but did not believe the reality of "the things" they knew. This progression from knowledge to belief is the essence of our conversion and reconversion.

*24:20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him-* Even at that early stage it was clear to all that the responsibility for the Lord's death was with the Jews and not the Romans. The very words for "delivered up to be crucified" were several times on the Lord's lips, predicting His fate. But He had always continued with the prediction that then after three days, He would rise again (:7; Mt. 20:15). They were repeating His words but had subconsciously removed the idea of resurrection from them. All was in place for the penny to drop- in realizing that now, after three days, the Lord had indeed risen and appeared.

*24:21 But we had hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel. Moreover besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came to pass-* When the night seems darkest, dawn often breaks. And so it was again here; the passing of three days meant they assumed that His body had now decomposed. When in fact the passing of those three days meant that now was the time to expect His predicted resurrection.

The two on the way to Emmaus commented that they thought Christ would have "redeemed" Israel (Lk. 24:21). A.D. Norris makes a powerful

case for one of those two being Peter (*Peter: Fisher Of Men* p.109). The only other time the Greek word is used is (again?) by Peter in 1 Pet. 1:18,19, where he reassures his weary sheep that "Ye were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ"- as if to say 'it's really all wonderfully true! I too doubted it, as you know. But I know now that it is true; even I was redeemed, from the shame of those denials, and so much else. Believe it with me!'. After all the Lord had taught about salvation, the eloquent and yet simple explanation of salvation in the Kingdom through His death, Peter and the others thought that His cross ("precious blood") hadn't brought redemption. How weak their understanding was, how slow they were. And Peter again is gently prodding from his own example and pattern of growth: 'Can't you see the reality of it all? Or are you still as inexplicably slow to see it all as I was?'

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were like Nicodemus. They made a great commitment to tell a stranger that they had believed in Jesus of Nazareth and His words about resurrection (Lk. 24:19-21). Remember how at that very time, the disciples locked themselves indoors for fear of the Jews. They said what they did and took the 'chance' they did, without believing Jesus would rise. They were motivated by the cross to simply stand up and be counted, with no hope of future reward.

The Jewish public looked for Jesus to release them from Roman bondage; but He patiently and repeatedly explained that His Kingdom was not of this world, rather would it come in a political sense at His second coming; and the essence of the Kingdom and liberation He preached was spiritual and internal, rather than physical and external. Yet the disciples didn't get it- they thought Jesus would've redeemed Israel there and then (Lk. 24:21). Their total lack of attention to the Lord's words is brought out by their lament that now was "the third day" after His death- when this ought to have been the very day they were looking for His resurrection!

24:22 *Further, certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the tomb-* The disciples were "astonished" (Lk. 24:22) and "marvelled" (Lk. 24:12,41). The same two Greek words recur together in Acts 2:7,12, describing how the crowd to whom the disciples preached soon afterwards were likewise "amazed and marvelled". Perhaps this was how and why the disciples (and Peter especially) could achieve such a rapport with that crowd- because they had experienced those very same feelings when their faith and understanding was so weak.

24:23 *And when they did not find his body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive-* The women said they had seen "a vision of Angels" rather than actual Angels (Lk. 24:23). They like the disciples later (Lk. 24:37) wished to spiritualize everything rather than face the fact that the real Christ had risen in

concrete and actual reality. The theological tendency to spiritualize the person of the Lord Jesus likewise has its psychological roots in a difficulty in believing the wonderful literal truths of the Lord's resurrection, current personal existence, and His literal return.

*24:24 And some of them that were with us went to the tomb, and found it even as the women had said. But him they saw not-* Luke stresses that they had failed to believe the chosen witnesses of the Lord's resurrection; they were caught up in the secular spirit of their age, which refused to accept female testimony. And all this paves the way to the commission for them, the one time disbelievers and doubters without excuse, to go out and tell the world to believe in the Lord's resurrection, warning that there was going to be condemnation for those who disbelieved their message (Mk. 16:16). Their appeal to men was therefore on the basis that they themselves had so miserably failed to believe. We note too that the claim that John saw and believed (Jn. 20:8) was perhaps only momentary faith that then dwindled; or maybe the idea was that he only later believed.

*24:25 And he said to them: O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!-* The Lord by contrast had been of quick understanding in spiritual things (Is. 11:3). Their slowness was inexcusable; it was related to a "hardness" of heart (Mk. 16:14). They ought to have connected the events experienced not simply with the Lord's own predictions, but with the words in "all" the prophetic scriptures about the sufferings and resurrection of Messiah. We might be inclined to think that it is a tall order to discern these things in "all" the prophets. But the Lord expected it of His men. Misunderstanding and blindness to the things of God's word are therefore presented here as worthy of rebuke by the Lord Jesus. Our insistence that 'I just didn't see it' is not of itself an excuse. This should provide us every motivation in our Bible reading. The Father and Son are eager to reveal themselves to us. We are asked to have active minds, ever sensitive to the implications of God's words; just as we would be to the words of the 'other' in any human relationship.

*24:26 Was it not necessary that the Christ suffer these things and so enter into his glory?-* The idea of a suffering Messiah is somewhat veiled in the Old Testament, we might think. But the Lord expected them to see the obvious necessity of what had happened; that glory could only be entered through suffering. We note that the Lord felt He had 'entered glory' even before His ascension. And yet there is not a word about this in the historical account of His resurrection.

*24:27 And beginning from Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them from all the scriptures, the things concerning himself-* This way of beginning in the prophets and explaining the "things concerning" the Lord Jesus was copied by Philip (Acts 8:35). Luke, who also wrote Acts, is seeking to develop the idea of a continuity of witness between the Lord

and all those in Him. "The things concerning" the Lord Jesus were the same things taught by Philip (Acts 8:12). "He interpreted for them" may be seen as an act of His grace; for He has just implied that they were unreasonably slow to have interpreted the prophets; He had expected them to interpret them as pointing to the things of His sufferings and resurrection. And so He does it for them here.

*24:28 And they drew near to the village where they were going, and he made as though he would go further-* We recall how the Lord appeared as if He would have walked past the suffering disciples in the boat, and how He surely pretended to be asleep in the midst of a storm in another boat. He has this style to this day, not responding immediately to requests, or appearing to be distant- in order to pique our desire for Him. And so it worked here; they responded by desperately urging Him to abide with them, to eat with them in their home- the ultimate sign of spiritual fellowship and acceptance. But this was provoked by His apparent distance from them and appearance of wanting to go away from them.

*24:29 And they urged him, saying: Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent. And he went in to stay with them-* This is all very much the language of John's gospel about the Lord wanting to abide with people. We also have here presented the ideal image of a house church, with the Lord welcomed in and abiding through His Spirit. The Comforter passages assure us that the Lord's presence is just as much with us through His Spirit as it was in physical terms.

*24:30 And it came to pass, when he had sat down with them to eat, he took the bread, and blessing and breaking it, he gave to them-* This is framed in the language of the breaking of bread service. It leads us to conclude that the 'breaking of bread' was simply an eating together; for to share food together at the same table was a religious act. Likewise Paul's sharing of food with his fellow passengers during the storm of Acts 27 is presented as a breaking of bread. Clearly the table was open to all, and was devoid of the fences placed around it by later Christian development.

*24:31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight-* The opening of their eyes is not to be taken as meaning that it was not their fault that they failed to perceive Him. For they are upbraided for being so slow of perception; but that hardness of heart (Mk. 16:14) was confirmed, as Pharaoh's was, by the Lord hardening their hearts. And that was only removed by grace.

He was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke bread. The way He handled the loaf, His mannerisms, His way of speaking

and choice of language, were evidently the same after His resurrection as before (Lk. 24:30,31). The Lord is the same today as yesterday.

*24:32 And they said to each other: Was not our heart burning within us, while he spoke to us on the road, while he opened up the scriptures to us?*- Their hearts were burning, on fire, with the unexpressed sense that this just might be the Lord. The opening of their eyes is paralleled here with the opening of the Old Testament scriptures. But academic understanding, the gift of hearing correct interpretation, left their eyes still closed, although their hearts / minds were on fire. It was still by grace that their eyes were opened to the real implications of all that wonderful Biblical exposition; that of itself did not open their eyes. There still had to be that higher hand, that other element.

*24:33 And they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven gathered together, and those that were with them*- Note that the great commission to preach which follows was first given to "the eleven and those with him", i.e. the women. Acts 1:13,14 speaks of "the eleven and the women"- the same two groups. The great commission was not therefore solely given to the eleven. Their finding the "eleven" there rather precludes the otherwise attractive suggestion of Lightfoot and A.D. Norris that one of the two on the road to Emmaus was Peter. Likewise the two were told that the Lord had appeared to Peter (:34).

*24:34 Saying: The Lord has indeed risen, and has appeared to Simon!*- See on Mt. 17:1. The graciously unrecorded appearing of the risen Lord to Peter (1 Cor. 15:5; Lk. 24:34) may have involved the Lord simply appearing to Him, without words. It was simply the assurance that was there in the look on the face of the Lord. It was not until the meeting by the lake in Galilee in John 21 that the Lord raised Peter's denials with him. And this sets us an example in when and how to deal with issues. There is a time and place, and not always at first meeting.

*24:35 And they told the things that had happened on the road, and how he was known to them by the breaking of the bread*- The Lord held the memorial meeting as a keeping of a Passover, and yet He changed some elements of it. In like manner He was made known to the disciples "in the breaking of bread", perhaps because it was usual for the host to say the blessing before the meal, and yet Jesus the stranger, the guest, presumed to lead the prayer. We have established here the idea of the Lord's special manifestation at the breaking of bread meeting. He was and still is known to us in the breaking of bread.

*24:36 And as they spoke these things, he stood in the midst of them, and said to them: Peace to you!*- The Lord was aware of their sense of guilt

over deserting Him, and in not perceiving the obvious necessity of His resurrection. His first word to them was therefore an assurance of "peace", a term usually used in the Bible in the context of peace with God through forgiveness.

*24:37 But they were terrified and afraid, and supposed that they saw a ghost-* Yet again they are presented as lacking in faith and discernment; even the two who had just met the Lord in their own home. They preferred to think of Him as some disembodied spirit rather than face up to the amazing truth that He was before them in real, bodily, personal form. The theological tendencies towards belief in disembodied existence and the spiritualizing of the Lord's resurrection are likewise reflections of a basic lack of faith in the most challenging of realities; that the body of Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, and He exist now in a personal form, and shall likewise return.

*24:38 And he said to them: Why are you disturbed? And why do questions arise in your heart?-* "Questions" is literally 'reasonings'. 'It could be this, might be that... who knows for sure' is therefore exposed as at times an excuse for lack of faith in challenging realities. Noting this is not to say that all things Biblical are clear and capable of simplistic explanation. Rather is it a caveat against dodging the requirement of simple faith by complex reasoning. We think of the Lord's criticism of "the depths of satan as they speak" noted on Rev. 2:24. The disciples likely had considered all manner of conspiracy theories and wild possibilities, rather than face up to the simple requirements of faith. They had likewise been "disturbed" when they saw the Lord walking on the water and had again concluded it was a ghost (s.w. Mt. 14:26). They were intended to have learned from that failure, just as we too are taught by our failures and are expected to build upon them for greater tests yet to come. The Lord had urged them not to be "troubled" (s.w. "disturbed") in Jn. 14:1,27. He is now enquiring why those words of His had been ignored by them.

*24:39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me and see! For a ghost has not flesh and bones, as you see me having-* See on 1 Cor. 5:5. He is concerned at their excusing their lack of faith in Him by their various wrong ideas about disembodied existence. Here we see how theological error, such as belief in ghosts or an immortal soul, leads us away from simple faith.

Note that whilst flesh and *blood* cannot inherit the Kingdom, the risen, immortal Lord Jesus described Himself as flesh and *bones*. In fact, we find that "flesh and bones" are often paralleled (Gen. 2:23; Job 10:11; 33:21; Ps. 38:3; Prov. 14:30), and simply mean 'the person', or as the Lord put it on that occasion, "I myself". We ourselves will be in the Kingdom, with similar personalities we have now [that's a very challenging thought of itself]. "Flesh" doesn't necessarily have to refer, in

every instance, to something condemned. Who we are now is who we will essentially be in the eternity of God's Kingdom. Let's not allow any idea that somehow our flesh / basic being is so awful that actually, the essential "I myself" will be dissolved beneath the wrath of God at the judgment. The Lord is "the saviour of the body" and will also save our "spirit" at the last day; so that we, albeit with spirit rather than blood energizing us, will live eternally. Understanding things this way enables us to perceive more forcefully the eternal importance of who we develop into as persons, right now. The Buddhist belief that we will ultimately not exist, that such 'Nirvana' is the most wonderful thing to hope for, appears at first hearing a strange 'hope' to be shared by millions of followers. But actually, it's the same essential psychology as that behind the idea that 'I will not exist in the Kingdom of God, I will be given a new body, person and character. It's actually saying the same- I won't exist. And it's rooted in a terribly low self-image, a dis-ease with ourselves, a lack of acceptance of ourselves as the persons whom God made us and develops us into. Whilst of course our natures will be changed, so that we can be immortal, it is we who will be saved; our body will be resurrected, made new, and our spirit "saved" in that day, reunited with our renewed and immortal bodies. We have eternal life in the sense that who we are now, in spiritual terms, is who we will eternally be. Our spirit, the essential us, is in this sense immortal; it's remembered with the Lord. In this sense, not even death itself, nor time itself, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39). Just as we still love someone after they have died, remembering as they do who they were and still are to us, so it is with the love of God for the essential us. Hence 1 Pet. 3:4 speaks of how a "gentle and calm disposition" or spirit is in fact "imperishable" (NAB)- because that spirit of character will be eternally remembered. This is why personality and character, rather than physical works, are of such ultimate and paramount importance. How we speak now is in a way, how we will eternally speak- I think that's the idea of Prov. 12:19: "The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment". Our "way" of life and being is how we will eternally be- and for me that solves the enigma of Prov. 12:28: "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death". In Jeremiah 18, God likens Himself to a potter working with us the clay. We can resist how He wants us to be, and He can make us into something else... we are soft clay until the 'firing'; and the day of firing is surely the day of judgment. The implication is that in this life we are soft clay; but the day of judgment will set us hard as the persons we have become, or have been made into, in this life.

The disciples thought the resurrected Christ was a spirit, a ghost. They returned to their old superstitions. Yet He didn't respond by lecturing them about the death state or that all existence is only bodily, much as He could have done. Instead He adopted for a moment their position and

reasoned from it: "A spirit has not flesh and bones as you see me have". The essence of His concern was their doubt in Him and His resurrection, rather than their return to wrong superstitions.

24:40 *And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet-* He wanted them to handle Him; and John opens his letters in 1 Jn. 1:1-4 by saying that this was exactly what they had done. Their reticence to touch Him was perhaps due to their sense that by doing so they would have to jettison all beliefs in ghosts and disembodied existence. We too can refuse to even consider evidence because too much is at stake if it is true.

24:41 *And while they still disbelieved for joy and wondered, he said to them: Have you here anything to eat?-* The disciples are described as sleeping for sorrow, not believing for joy. Both their unbelief and their sorrow and failure to support the Lord in His time of need are not really excusable by either sorrow nor joy. And yet the Lord generously imputes these excuses to His men, such is His love for them. They are described as being "glad" when they saw the risen Lord (Jn. 20:20). Yet actually they didn't believe at that time- for Lk. 24:41 generously says that they "believed not for joy". And they assumed that Jesus was a phantom, not the actual, concrete, bodily Jesus. Placing the records together doesn't give a very positive image of the disciples at this time. And yet the record is so positive about them. The disciples are said not to have believed "for joy" (Lk. 24:41). But the Lord upbraided them for their arrant foolishness and plain unbelief. They slept, we are told, "for sorrow"- when they should have stayed awake as commanded.

One hallmark of the spiritual way of life is an indomitably *positive spirit*. Not a simplistic naivety, blindly hoping for the best in an almost fatalistic way. But as the Father and Son are so essentially positive, so will we be, if we absorb something of His Spirit. Thus the disciples are said not to have believed "for joy". But the Lord upbraided them for their arrant foolishness and plain unbelief.

Joy isn't really a cause for disbelief. It's the grace in the inspired record which makes that excuse for them. They preferred to spiritualize everything, as many do today, rather than face the actual implications of a Lord who is for real. They accepted it was Jesus, and yet they still disbelieved. Note in this context how the women said they had seen "a vision of Angels" rather than actual Angels (Lk. 24:23). This incident of eating was to yet again reassure them that He was for real. Note how later on, by the sea of Tiberias, Jesus again ate before them- He had to keep repeating Himself to get it home to them, that He was for real. If those men, who had heard the many predictions of resurrection from the lips of the Lord Himself, found it hard to believe He

was for real when He stood before them- how understandably hard it is for us to grasp that He is for real.

24:42 *And they gave him a piece of a boiled fish-* Eating fish was something which they had likely seen Him do in their days together in Galilee. There was a continuity between His mortal life and His immortal life. The same Jesus who walked the streets of Galilee shall come again, and be essentially the same. For immortality does not swallow up basic personality; it is that which is in fact saved.

24:43 *And he took it and ate before them-* Taking and eating before the disciples is the very language of the last supper (Mt. 26:26; 1 Cor. 11:24). He was replicating both the last supper and the meal He had just had with the two in Emmaus. Eating together was a sign of acceptance and religious fellowship; the Lord was and is demonstrating that He accepts us in that He shares food with us. The form of that food is not important; here He uses fish rather than bread.

24:44 *And he said to them: These are my words which I spoke to you while I was yet with you, that all things necessary be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning me-* As the resurrected Lord stood before the disciples, he says: "These are my words which I spoke to you", and goes on to say that His resurrection had been predicted throughout the Old Testament words of God. He had made both His words and the words of God into flesh as He stood there. His words were as it were of the same nature as the words of the Old Testament about Him. He didn't say 'Look everyone, I've risen!'. He just stood there, reminded them of the words of the prophets, and His own words, and said "These are my words". He was so powerfully and completely the word made flesh.

24:45 *Then opened he their mind so that they might understand the scriptures-* He had already opened the Scriptures to the two from Emmaus, and had opened their eyes. Now He does that to the whole group, and therefore does this a second time to the two from Emmaus.

Prophecy does not have to refer to specific, lexical statements; it can refer to the spirit and implication behind the recorded words. Thus "the Scriptures" prophesied Christ's resurrection after three days (Lk. 24:45; 1 Cor. 15:3,4); but nowhere is this explicitly prophesied. It is implied in the spirit behind the types, e.g. of Jonah and Gen. 22:4. So as 'prophecy' is not just the words but the spirit behind them, so prayer is not just the words, but the spirit in the man's heart who prays, even if the words come out wrong. See on Acts 10:4.

24:46 *And he said to them: Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day-* This may be the rubric He used; quoting various Old Testament passages ["Thus it is written"]

and then explaining how they meant that the Christ should suffer and rise again. This is how our teaching should also proceed; quoting the actual text of Scripture and then offering interpretation of the words read.

24:47 *And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem-* See on Acts 10:35,36. The parallel record to the preaching commissions of Mk. 16 and Mt. 28 is found in Lk. 24:45-47. There we read how the Lord explained to the disciples that their preaching of the Gospel "among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" was foretold in the Psalms and prophets. So the Bible student asks: *Where* in the Psalms and prophets? The Lord spoke as if the prophecies about this were copious. There do not seem to be any specific prophecies which speak of the twelve spreading the Gospel from Jerusalem in the first century. Instead we read of the Gospel being spread from Jerusalem *in the Kingdom*, and often the phrase "all nations" occurs in a Kingdom context, describing how "all nations" will come to worship Christ at Jerusalem (Ps. 22:27; 67:2; 72:11,17; 82:8; 86:9; 117:1; Is. 2:2; 66:18,20; Jer. 3:17; Dan. 7:14; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:23). This selection of "Psalms and prophets" is impressive. Yet the Lord Jesus clearly interpreted these future Kingdom passages as having relevance to the world-wide spreading of the Gospel. "All nations" also occurs in many passages exhorting us to praise Yahweh among all the nations of this world. The reason for this is that God's glory is so great it should be declared as far as possible by us. 1 Chron. 16:24,25 is typical of many such verses: "Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. *For* great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised... for all the gods of the people are idols". World-wide preaching is therefore an aspect of our praise of Yahweh, and as such it is a spiritual work which is timeless. Because the Kingdom is to spread world-wide, we should therefore spread the Good News of this coming Kingdom world-wide. In prospect- and no more than that, let it be noted- the Kingdom has been established in that Christ has all power in Heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18). This is the language of Dan. 7:14 concerning the future Kingdom. The believer must live the Kingdom life now, as far as possible (Rom. 13:12,13). In the Kingdom, we will be spreading the Gospel throughout this planet. In this life too we should live in the spirit of the Kingdom in this regard.

The preaching of the Gospel was prophesied as *beginning* at Jerusalem, Jesus said. If this world-wide preaching abruptly finished at the end of the first century, to begin again at Jerusalem in the Kingdom, surely this would be prophesied in the Old Testament? The impression one gets from the Old Testament passages listed above is that the Gospel would begin to spread from Jerusalem, and would *go on spreading* until the full establishment of the Kingdom. This explains why Christ's command to get

up and go world-wide with the Gospel stands for all time. The command to preach to "all nations" would ring bells in Jewish minds with the promises to Abraham, concerning the blessing of forgiveness to come upon "all nations" through Messiah (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). Therefore God's people are to preach the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ to "all nations". The offer of sharing in that blessing did not close at the end of the first century. Putting the "all nations" of the Abrahamic promises together with Christ's preaching commission leads to a simple conclusion: The Hope of Israel now applies to all nations; so go and tell this good news to all nations.

Luke uses the same word translated 'preach' in both Luke and the Acts [although the other Gospels use it only once]. In Luke we find the word in 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18,43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1; and in Acts, in 5:42; 8:4,12,25,35,40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7,15,21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18. Luke clearly saw the early ecclesia as preaching the same message as Jesus and the apostles; they continued what was essentially a shared witness. This means that we too are to see in the Lord and the twelve as they walked around Galilee the basis for our witness; we are continuing their work, with just the same message and range of responses to it. Lk. 24:47 concludes the Gospel with the command to go and preach remission of sins, continuing the work of the Lord Himself, who began His ministry with the proclamation of remission (Lk. 4:18 cp. 1:77). Acts stresses that the believers did just this; they preached remission of sins [s.w.] in Jesus' Name, whose representatives they were: Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18. See on Acts 1:1.

As the Lord appeals to all nations, so should we. The prophecies which He interpreted as referring to the church spreading the Gospel world-wide are specifically described as prophecies about Him personally (Lk. 24:44,47: "All things which were written in the prophets and in the psalms, concerning *me* ... that repentance and remission of sins should be preached..."). Thus the preachers of the Gospel would personally manifest Christ; which accounts for the special sense of His presence which they experience as they do this work (Mt. 28:20).

Such is the power of our preaching, the possibility which our words of witness give to our hearers. We have such power invested in us! If we are slack to use it, the Lord's glory is limited, and the salvation of others disabled. As if to bring this home, the New Testament quotes several passages evidently prophetic of the future Kingdom as having their fulfilment in the preaching of the Gospel today:

- Is. 2:2-4 (the word of Yahweh *will* go out from Jerusalem) = the ecclesia's witness to the world today, "beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:47). This, the Lord said, was in fulfilment of the OT prophets- and He could only be referring to those like Isaiah.

- Am. 9:11,12 had its fulfilment in the work of preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-18; 26:16-18).
- Likewise Is. 54:12 = Gal. 4:27; we extend the joy of the Kingdom to our hearers.
- Is. 52:7 = Rom. 10:15.
- Is. 11:10 = Rom. 15:12.

The apparent inappropriacy or lack of context of these quotations need not worry us. It is not that they have no future fulfilment They evidently will have, at the Lord's second coming. But God sees that which shall be as already happening; His perspective is outside of our kind of time. The ecclesia's preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom to the world is effectively a spreading of the Kingdom to them; in that those who respond properly will ultimately be in God's Kingdom. But God sees through that gap between their response and the final establishment of the Kingdom; He invites us to see it as if we have spread the Kingdom to them. As we present the Gospel to men and women of all races, we are enabling the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham. The more we preach, the more glorious is their fulfilment This is the power of our Gospel and the preaching of it. Let's not treat it as something ordinary or optional or to be fitted in to our spare time.

Luke records how the Angel summarised the Lord's work as good news of great joy for *all men* (Lk. 2:10). The Gospel concludes by asking *us* to take that message to *all men*. Straight away we are challenged to analyse our preaching of the Gospel: is it a telling of "great joy" to others, or merely a glum 'witness' or a seeking to educate them 'how to read the Bible more effectively', or a sharing with them the conclusions of our somewhat phlegmatic Biblical researches? Whatever we teach, it must be a joyful passing on of *good* news of "great joy". The Lord began His ministry by proclaiming a freedom from burdens through Him (Lk. 4). And He concludes it by telling the disciples to proclaim the same deliverance (Lk. 24:47). Consider how He brings together various passages from Isaiah in His opening declaration in Lk. 4:18:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach [proclaim] [Heb. 'call out to a man'] the acceptable year of the Lord".* This combines allusions to Is. 61:1 (Lev. 25:10); Is. 58:6 LXX and Is. 61:2.

Is. 58:6 AV: "To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free (cp. Dt. 15:12 re freedom of slaves, s.w.), and that you break every yoke" is in the context of an insincerely kept year of Jubilee in Hezekiah's time, after the Sennacherib invasion. Is. 58 has many Day of Atonement allusions- the year of Jubilee began on this feast. We are as the High Priest declaring the reality of forgiveness to the crowd. Hence Lk. 24:47 asks us to proclaim a Jubilee of atonement. The Greek for "preach" in Lk. 24:47 and for "preach /

proclaim the acceptable year" in Lk. 4:19 are the same, and the word is used in the LXX for proclaiming the Jubilee. And the LXX word used for 'jubilee' means remission, release, forgiveness, and it is the word used to describe our preaching / proclaiming forgiveness in Lk. 24:47. It could be that we are to see the cross as the day of atonement, and from then on the Jubilee should be proclaimed in the lives of those who accept it. It's as if we are running round telling people that their mortgages have been cancelled, hire purchase payments written off...and yet we are treated as telling them something unreal, when it is in fact so real and pertinent to them. And the very fact that *Yahweh* has released others means that we likewise ought to live in a spirit of releasing others from their debts to us: "The creditor shall release that which he hath lent... *because* the Lord's release hath been proclaimed" (Dt. 15:2 RV).

We can't have a spirit of meanness in our personal lives if we are proclaiming *Yahweh's* release. This is one of many instances where the process of preaching the Gospel benefits the preacher. The jubilee offered release from the effects of past misfortune and even past foolishness in decisions; and our offer of jubilee offers this same message in ultimate term. Incidentally, the Lord had implied that we are in a permanent Jubilee year situation when He said that we should "take no thought what you shall eat... Sow not nor gather into barns" and not think "What shall we eat?" (Mt. 6:26,31 = Lev. 25:20). There must be a spirit of telling this good news to absolutely *all*. And yet according to Luke's own emphasis, it is the poor who are especially attracted to the Jubilee message of freedom (Lk. 6:20-23; 7:1,22,23; 13:10-17). There are several links between Is. 58 and Neh. 5, where we read of poor Jews who had to mortgage their vineyards and even sell their children in order to pay their debts. The "oppressed" or "broken victim" of Is. 58, to whom we are invited to proclaim deliverance, were therefore in the very first instance those under the throttling grip of poverty, who had become bondslaves because of their debts and now had no hope of freedom, apart from the frank forgiveness of a year of Jubilee. We take a like message to Westerners overburdened with mortgage payments, to those suffering from absolute poverty in the developing world, and to all those with a sense of debt and being trapped within their life situation. We pronounce to them a year of Jubilee, a frank forgiveness, a way of real escape and freedom.

To preach [**proclaim**] the **acceptable year** of the Lord (Lk. 4:19) is thus parallel with "You shall **proclaim** liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (Lev. 25:10). Likewise there are to be found other such allusions to the proclamation of Jubilee: "We as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive... the grace of God... a time accepted... in the day of salvation [the Jubilee] have I succoured you:

behold, now is the **accepted time**" (2 Cor. 6:1,2) "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached [**proclaimed**, s.w. 4:19] in his name among all nations" (Lk. 24:47).

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24:48- see on Lk. 1:45; Acts 5:32.

*You are witnesses of these things*- He died and rose as the representative of all men; and therefore this good news should be preached to all kinds and all races of people. Men from all nations were in prospect sprinkled by His blood (Is. 52:15); and therefore we must extend the knowledge of this to all men, both in our collective and personal witness. Lk. 24:48 simply comments that the disciples were witnesses to the resurrection and the fact that forgiveness and salvation was therefore potentially available to all men. The parallel records in Mt. and Mk. say that they were told to go out and witness to the resurrection world-wide. Putting them together it is apparent that if we are truly witnesses of the resurrection in our own faith, then part and parcel of this is to take this witness out into our own little worlds.

Matthew and Mark record how the Lord told the disciples to go world-wide with the message of His death and resurrection; He commanded them to do this. Luke's account is different. He reminds them of His death and resurrection, and simply adds: "And you are witnesses of these things". Not 'you *will be*, I'm telling you to be, witnesses...'. The very fact of having seen and known them was of itself an imperative to bear witness to them. This is the outgoing power of the cross.

Lk. 24:46-49 records Luke's version of the great preaching commission given in Mk. 16 and Mt. 28. He doesn't record that the Lord actually told the disciples to go out and preach. Instead He says that the OT prophets foretold the world-wide preaching of the Gospel of His death and resurrection, "and you are witnesses of these things". It's as if He's saying, 'If you are a witness to all this, you must be a witness of it to all' (cp. Acts 1:8). If we are witnesses, we will bear witness; we will naturally. We have to; and note how Lev. 5:1 taught that it was a sin not to bear witness / testify when one had been a witness. This may well be consciously alluded to in the language of witness which we have in Lk. 24:48.

24:49 *And I will send to you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high*- John's record shows that they disobeyed this, returning to Galilee in disillusion, where the Lord met them again. The disciples then returned from Galilee to Jerusalem and were given the great commission again, as recorded in

Matthew and Luke. The sending of what the Father promised refers to the Comforter, the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus in the hearts of His people, to such an extent that His physical absence is more than compensated for by this very real sense of His presence. Being clothed with heavenly power refers to the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, given to the disciples to help them take the Gospel to all the world. This is why the implication is that once they had received them, they were not to remain in Jerusalem, but to leave the city and go into all the world. The clothing with miraculous power was the first century manifestation of the gift of the Comforter, but the Comforter was and is a gift for all time.

*24:50 And he led them out until they were as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them-* Whilst the disciples went from Bethany to the mount of Olives and there met the Angels, the point of ascension was from Bethany. It has been argued that Bethany counts as part of the mount of Olives, but checking out a map will indicate that this is a forced and desperate claim. He ascended from Bethany; and the next we know we read of them being told by Angels on the mount of Olives that the Lord shall return (Acts 1:12). I suggest they hurried the two miles to the highest point nearby to watch His slow ascent into Heaven. He is therefore pictured in the house church at Bethany, and ascending from there, with hands raised in blessing upon His church, as the High Priest of the new Israel (Lev. 9:22).

*24:51 And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven-* The blessing would likely have been that of Numbers 6:23, with uplifted hands (:50). And He ascended with those uplifted hands, still uttering blessing upon them. This is how He was to be imagined in Heaven, blessing us, His wondering but obedient people. He died on the cross with hands likewise uplifted, so we are invited to see Him living out the spirit of His death for us even in His ascension and subsequent heavenly glory.

*24:52 And they did homage to him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy-* Humanly speaking, they would have felt sad at His departure. But they had great joy. This is in exact fulfilment of the promise of the Comforter; that His physical departure would be more than compensated for by the gift of His spirit in their hearts which would result in His joy being within them. At His physical departure, this blessing was given to them.

*24:53 And were continually in the temple, praising God-* They continued to hold the wrong idea that the temple was somehow the sacred space where God was to be praised. Their misunderstandings did not however

mean that they were not legitimately in fellowship with the Father and Son. We have noted elsewhere that Luke's concluding words are connected with words at the opening of his gospel (see on :47). And here we have a clear connection with Anna, who was continually in the temple praising God (2:37). That woman is presented as representative of the disciples at this point, and thereby of the entire body of Christ, who are to be continually occupied in God's house with His service, based upon our experience of His Son.