

**Discovering Christ**  
in  
**The Gospel of Luke**

by  
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# Chapter 1

## Christ the Son of Man

### Luke 1:1-4

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed” (Luke 1:1-4).

As we have seen in our studies of Matthew and Mark, each of the four gospels were written by divine inspiration, each revealing the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, but each one was intended by the Holy Spirit to set forth a particular, distinct aspect of our Savior’s person and work. Neither of the gospel narratives gives us a complete view of Christ; but all four taken together tell us plainly and fully who the Lord Jesus Christ is, what he did, why he did it and where he is now. — Matthew was written to show us that our Lord Jesus Christ is the divine Messiah, the Redeemer-King promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. — Mark was inspired to present the Lord Jesus as Jehovah’s righteous Servant. — John’s gospel sets forth the glorious divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ as God the Son, the second person in the holy trinity. — Luke’s gospel was designed and written to show us the perfect and glorious humanity of our Savior. Just as John shows us that our Redeemer is the Son of God, Luke shows us that he is the Son of Man.

## Son of Man

Luke was inspired of God to present our Savior distinctly as “*the Son of man*”. That is the title our Lord used to describe himself more than any other. As we read the Gospel of Luke, the One we meet here is the Redeemer-King Matthew described, the Righteous Servant Mark portrayed, and the incarnate God John declares. He is the same Person; but Luke presents him primarily as the Man who is God, while John presents him as the God who is also man.

Luke gives us more details than either Matthew or Mark about our Savior’s birth. Luke alone tells us a little bit about our Lord’s childhood. He stresses more than the other gospel writers our Redeemer’s dependence upon his Father in prayer, his poverty, and his sympathy with men. He does this because it is his purpose to show us that our Savior’s perfect humanity is just as essential to his saving work as his divinity. He could not accomplish his mission were he not both God and man in one glorious person. Luke’s message is essentially contained in the words of our Lord in chapter 19. — “*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (19:10).

## Luke and Acts

Luke specifically wrote his gospel to a man named “*Theophilus*”. This is the same man to whom he addressed the Book of Acts. Both Luke and Acts were written specifically for this man Theophilus (Acts 1:1-2). We know nothing about him, except what Luke himself tells us. This Theophilus was a man of rank and honor. Luke calls him “*most excellent Theophilus.*” Not many noble are called (1 Corinthians 1:26), but some are. God has chosen some of all ranks. The name Theophilus means either “lover of God,” or “loved of God”. The Book of Acts is really a continuation of Luke’s Gospel, as he indicates in the opening verses of Acts 1. The Gospel of Luke describes the works of Christ while he was on the earth. In the Book of Acts Luke picks up right where he left off in his Gospel narrative; only in Acts he

describes the works of the ascended Christ through his church.

In Acts 1 Luke describes his gospel as “*a treatise of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up.*” Though they did not record every word and deed of Christ (John 21:25), Luke and the other gospel writers did record all that the Holy Spirit inspired, all that we need to know, particularly all that Christ did and said relating to the salvation of his people; his obedience to the Father, his conformity to the law, and his death as our Substitute, by which he brought in everlasting righteousness and obtained eternal redemption for us.

## Things Most Surely Believed

Then Luke tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ gave his commandments by the Holy Spirit to chosen apostles, and by them to his church. All the doctrines and ordinances, faith and practice of the church are by the commandment of Christ, laid down in the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). Both in Acts and here, at the very outset of his Gospel, Luke tells us that his intention in writing this gospel narrative was “*to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us*” (1:1).

Contrary to popular opinion, believers are people who believe some things, some specific things, and all believers believe them. All Christians do, most assuredly, believe some specific things. We believe those things revealed in the Book of God. Anyone who does not believe that which God reveals in the Inspired Volume of Holy Scripture is not a Christian, is not a believer, and does not know God, no matter what he may profess. Roger Ellsworth wrote, “The church is a community of faith, a community that tenaciously holds with overpowering conviction to a distinct body of truths.”

Yes, there are some things all true Christians believe. Luke makes no bones about this. Neither should we. Let men accuse us of being narrow-minded dogmatists, out of step with the rest of the religious world, and heap upon us whatever ugly names they choose, the Word of God plainly declares that some things are

vital. Some things must be known and believed. Those who do not believe these things are not saved.

- Luke tells us that he wrote his gospel “*to set forth in order those things which are most surely believed among us.*” All who are, like Theophilus, *lovers of God* love those things most surely believed among us. What are those things? Luke does not leave us to decide for ourselves what they are. He tells us plainly some of those things most assuredly believed by all who know and love, trust and worship the God of Glory.
- Luke shows us that all men are sinners in need of God’s salvation, -- lost, ruined, dead in trespasses and sins, under the curse of God’s holy law, and totally incapable of changing their condition. He tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost, like the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost Son (chap. 15).
- Luke also shows us that the Man, Jesus, is the Christ and that he is the incarnate God. All who are taught of God believe that the Son of God came into this world in the flesh (1:35; 9:20).
- Every believer gladly confesses, with Zechariah, that the Lord Jesus Christ has effectually accomplished and obtained salvation for sinners by his obedience and death as the sinners Substitute (1:68). Remember, that which Zechariah spoke concerning the accomplishments of Christ, he spoke being filled with the Holy Ghost. He tells us that Christ accomplished redemption and explains exactly what that means (1:67-79).
- This salvation which Christ obtained for his elect by his blood atonement, by effectual, accomplished redemption, comes to sinners by the gift of God, according to his own sovereign, eternal purpose of grace in Christ, as a matter of pure grace (4:25-27).
- And Luke shows us that God’s grace in Christ is so abundantly free that every sinner in this world who

needs it has it (9:11). It is still true today — The Lord Jesus Christ heals all who have need of healing. That is to say, he saves all who need salvation.

## Luke's Distinctives

As we read the Gospel of Luke, we cannot help noticing that Luke tells us many precious things that are not even mentioned by any of the other inspired writers. — Luke alone gives us historic information about Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, and tells us about John's birth. — Only Luke tells us about the angel's announcement to Mary of our Savior's birth. — It is only in Luke's Gospel that we read of Simeon, Anna, and Mary's song. — Luke alone gives us information about our Redeemer's childhood. — None of the other Gospel narratives tell us about the conversions of Zaccheus and the dying thief. — Only Luke gives us the parables of The Good Samaritan, The Pharisee and the Publican, The Prodigal Son, and The Rich Man and Lazarus. — Only Luke tells us about the Lord's walk with two of his disciples along the Emmaus road after his resurrection. How thankful we are for these things! For these things, we are indebted to Luke, "*the beloved physician.*"

## Luke Himself

Who was this man, Luke? As we have seen, both this gospel narrative and the book of Acts were written by Luke. But who was Luke? He was a man of such modesty that he never mentioned his own name, even when he wrote about events in which he played a prominent role. Yet, he was, obviously, a man of remarkable usefulness in the early church.

Paul calls him, "*Luke the beloved physician*" (Colossians 4:14). As I observed concerning Theophilus, not many of the wise and noble of this world are called, but some are; and Luke was one of them. He was Paul's constant, faithful companion. He accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey as far as Philippi. There, after the Lord raised up a gospel church, Luke

stayed behind, probably to take care of and further instruct the young saints at Philippi in the things of God.

Seven years later, while Paul was on his third missionary journey, he and Luke joined up again at Philippi. As Paul went on his way to Jerusalem, Luke went with him. When Paul was arrested at Caesarea, Luke was with him. Luke was still by Paul's side when they sailed for Rome. He went with his friend through the perils of the sea and stayed by his side when he was arrested at Rome. Luke alone stayed with Paul to the end. When Paul was about to lay down his life as a martyr for Christ, he wrote, "*Only Luke is with me*" (2 Timothy 4:11).

Luke was a Gentile, as his name indicates, the only Gentile who was chosen of God to write a portion of the Inspired Volume of Holy Scripture.

## The Son of Man

Luke gives us a portrait of the Son of Man, the Man Christ Jesus. All the gospel writers show us both the divinity and the humanity of Christ; but John was distinctly written to set forth our Lord's eternal deity; and Luke was distinctly written to show us his perfect humanity. Let us never forget that our Lord Jesus Christ lived upon this earth the life of a perfect man, completely obedient to the will of God, as our Surety, Representative, Mediator, and Substitute, without sin in nature, thought, word, or deed. Had he not been a perfect man, he could not have been our Savior. Therefore, Luke was inspired of God to show us the perfection of our Savior as a real man.

The Lord Jesus Christ was a *Man of great courage*. He was not a hard, abrasive man; but he was a courageous man. This boldness and courage is seen most distinctly in our Lord's preaching. He knew that he was his Father's Servant. Therefore, he spoke the Word of God with unflinching courage (chapter 4). When he was advised to flee from Herod, he said, "Go tell that old fox that I am doing what I came here to do, and that he can't stop me" (Luke 13:32).

When the time came for him to lay down his life as our sin-atoning Substitute, our Savior set his face like a flint to go up to Jerusalem that he might accomplish the will of him that sent him (9:51). Fearlessly and unfalteringly, our Savior steadily walked, step by step, with determinate resolution, up to Mt. Calvary to lay down his life for us, according to the will of God, not in defeat, but in victory, not to be pitied, but worshipped.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was also *a Man of great tenderness*, compassion, and sympathy. He declared in his very first sermon, that he came here to preach the gospel to the poor, to set the captive free, and to give sight to the blind (4:18-19). Luke constantly portrays the Lord Jesus as a man full of compassion, drying tears of sorrow, pitying the outcast, entertaining despised publicans, receiving sinners, healing all who had need of healing. Let every man learn from the Master. — Manhood, real manhood involves both courage and compassion.

Moreover, and this is very, very important, as the perfect Man, our Lord Jesus Christ was *a Man of implicit faith*. He believed God perfectly. He lived in constant fellowship with God as a Man. What an example of consecration and faith he gave us! His very first recorded words were, “*I must be about my Father’s business*” (2:40). His last words before his final breath of mortality were, “*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*” (23:46). On at least eight other occasions, Luke describes our Lord Jesus as a Man of faith, calling upon God his Father, our Father, in prayer.

1. At His Baptism (3:21)
2. After Healing The Leper (5:16)
3. Before Choosing His Disciples (6:12)
4. Before Peter’s Great Confession (9:18)
5. At His Transfiguration (9:29)
6. Before Teaching His Disciples How to Pray (11:1)
7. In Gethsemane (22:42)
8. As He Hung upon the Cross (23:34)

As God’s servants in this world, we all must confess, with shame and sorrow, that we are often weak, hard hearted, and unbelieving. But, blessed be God, that Man who is our divine

Savior lived before God in the perfection of manhood for us – Perfect in Courage, — Perfect in Tenderness, Mercy and Compassion, — Perfect in Faith! But he is more than an exemplary Man...

Luke presents this holy Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, to us as *God's Salvation*. He brought salvation to sinners. He won it by his obedience. He bought it with his blood. He secured it by his ascension into heaven. He gives it by his grace. But Luke tells us more. He tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ himself is Salvation (2:25-32). Salvation is not a creed, a confession, a church, or an experience. Salvation is a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice in the blood and righteousness of Christ and adore his doctrine; but it is the Lord Jesus Christ himself that we trust, love and worship. — “*Unto you that believe, HE is precious.*”

The gospel we preach is the good news of salvation accomplished and secured by the obedience and death of the God-man, Christ Jesus. Luke, speaking in perfect harmony with all the prophets and apostles, tells us that this salvation is God's Salvation — His work, his property, his gift. It is a finished work. It is a work accomplished for sinners of every race, Jew and Gentile, everywhere. This salvation demands faith in Christ, a faith that only God himself can give, a faith that willingly bows to Christ as Lord, a salvation to be preached to all the world.

Luke's object is to show us the humanity of our Savior; but his humanity would be of no value to us, all that he was and did as a man would be totally without benefit to us, if he is not God. So Luke shows us that this great man is much more than that. He shows us that *this great Man is the almighty God*.

He has all power over all things, and exercises it all the time. The God-man, our Mediator, has complete authority over all evil (Luke 4:12, 35, 9:38, 11:14). He controls all of what men call “the elements of nature” (Luke 8:22-25, 9:12-17, 5:4-11). He has total dominion over life and death (Luke 8:41-42, 7:11-15). He has total dominion over sickness, disease, and trouble (Luke 5:12-13, 7:1-10, 4:38-35, 5:18-25, 6:6-10, 18:35-43). He has power in heaven and in earth to forgive sins (Luke 5:24, 7:48). He has the power and authority to bless people (Luke 6:20-22),

and to give people eternal life in heaven (Luke 23:43; 24:50). All things are in his hands (John 17:2).

## Gospel For Sinners

The gospel of God is a gospel for sinners; the good news of redemption obtained and salvation finished for poor, needy, lost sinners. And Luke's Gospel is just that. It is good news for needy sinners. Luke shows us the compassionate love of Christ in becoming Man to save us. He traces our Lord's descent back to Adam, and shows him as the Son of Man and the Son of God, the Savior of men. He is both the "*Son of the Highest*" and the Son of the lowest.

Like Matthew, Luke gives us our Lord's genealogy (3:23-38); but it is not the same. Matthew's account of the genealogy begins with Abraham and traces the Savior's lineage up to Joseph. Luke begins with the Savior himself and traces his lineage back to Adam, and then to God himself. Matthew shows us our Savior's lineage through Joseph, him "*being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph*" (Luke 3:23). Luke traces his lineage through Mary.

## The Shepherds

Instead of the visit of the Magi, Luke tells us of the common shepherds, to whom the Savior's birth was announced as glad-tidings of peace to all people, "*To you is born a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*"

## Simeon and Anna

Aged Simeon said, "*Mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation,*" as he took the Holy Child in his arms. And Anna "*spake of him to all that looked for Redemption in Israel.*" Luke records his compassion to the Widow of Nain (7:11-18), and of his tenderness and mercy toward the woman that was a sinner (7:36-50). Luke tells us the story of Zaccheus and of the consequent

murmuring of the Pharisees because he had gone to be a guest with a man which was a sinner (19:1-10).

## The Parables

The parables recorded in Luke's Gospel are intended to display both our Redeemer's compassion, and his saving power and efficacy. The Parable of The Good Samaritan shows us how condescending Christ is in the exercise of his saving mercy. The Parable of The Pharisee and the Publican show the contempt of our Savior for self-righteous religionists and his great mercy, love, and grace to needy sinners. The Parable of The Importunate Widow shows us how that all who need and seek his grace find it at the throne of grace. The Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son shows us the great joy there is in the very heart of God over the lost one that is found. In the Parable of the Great Supper (14:16-24; Matthew 22:1-14), it is Luke who tells us of the Lord's command to go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in. And the words, "*Yet there is room,*" seem to echo throughout these 24 chapters.

Luke alone tells us that when our Lord beheld the city, he wept over it (19:41-44). It is Luke who describes the Savior's bloody sweat in Gethsemane (22:39-46). Luke tells us of the saving power possessed by our Savior, as he hung upon the cursed tree, displayed in saving the dying thief, gathering as it were, even in his agony, the first-fruits of his atonement (23:39-43).

Luke alone gives us the account of our Lord's walk along the Emmaus Road with two of his troubled disciples after his resurrection (chap. 24). It may be, as some have suggested, that Luke was one of those two disciples. He tells of our Lord eating a piece of broiled fish and some honey to show us his perfect humanity, even after his resurrection. Yes, blessed be his name, that Man, who is risen and exalted, is still a man touched with the feeling of our infirmities, full of sympathy, and is the omnipotent God, able to help in time of need!

## The Last Scene

The last scene in the Gospel of Luke is a scene that Luke alone gives us (chap. 24). First, in verses 44-47 the Savior condescends to confirm the shaken faith of his fearful disciples and opens their understanding, to understand the Scriptures.

“And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

Then, he issues his commission to his church, assuring us of the power of his Spirit to do his work (vv. 48-49). — “*And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.*” And in verses 50-53 the crucified, risen Son of Man ascends to Glory to take his place on his throne as the God-man, and blesses his people as he ascends his throne. As he did, we read, “*And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands,*” those nail pierced hands into which the Lord God has placed the reigns of the universe as our Mediator, “*and blessed them,*” as the High Priest whose sacrifice God had accepted. “*And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.*” There he sits, King forever, our almighty and all-prevailing Advocate, God over all, full of mercy, love and grace. “*And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.*” Let us worship him, obey him with great joy, and ever be found praising and blessing our God because of this Man who is our Savior.

# Chapter 2

## Things Most Surely Believed Among Us

### Luke 1:1-4

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed” (Luke 1:1-4).

There are four things to be learned from these opening words of Luke’s gospel. I must give them to you with great brevity; but I pray that God the Holy Spirit, whose words they are, will burn them into our hearts.

### *Some Things All Christians Believe*

The first thing to be learned from the opening words of Luke’s gospel is the fact that there are some things all true Christians believe. Luke does not mince words about this. Neither should we. Let men accuse us of being narrow-minded dogmatists, out of step with the rest of the religious world, and heap upon us whatever ugly names they choose, the Word of God plainly declares that some things are vital. Some things must be known and believed. Those who do not believe these things are not saved.

Luke tells us that he wrote his gospel, “*to set forth in order those things which are most surely believed among us.*” All who are, like Theophilus, lovers of God, love those things most surely believed among us. What are those things? I will give them to you in five, unmistakable statements.

1. All men and women are sinners in need of God’s salvation, lost, ruined, dead in trespasses and sins, under the curse of God’s holy law, and totally incapable of changing their condition. Like the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son, described in the parable (Luke 15), none could ever be saved except the triune God seek us out, find us and bring us home to himself by redeeming blood and omnipotent grace.
2. Jesus Christ is the incarnate God. The Son of God came in the flesh (9:20).
3. The Lord Jesus Christ has effectually accomplished and obtained salvation for sinners by his obedience and death as the sinners Substitute (1:68).
4. This salvation comes to sinners by the gift of God, according to his own sovereign, eternal purpose of grace in Christ, as a matter of pure, free, sovereign grace (4:25-27).
5. God’s grace in Christ is so abundantly free that every sinner in this world who needs it has it (9:11).

## **Eyewitnesses and Ministers**

The second thing revealed here is the fact that God’s servants tell only what they know from first hand experience, by direct experience, by divine revelation, as those who are taught of God. Luke describes the apostles as those men who were “*eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.*” I am aware that these words, in their strict interpretation, apply only to the apostles, those who saw the Lord Jesus in the flesh and learned the gospel

directly from his lips. But there are no apostles, in the official sense of that word today. Does that mean the text has no meaning for us? Of course not! All true gospel preachers, like the original apostles, are also “*eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.*”

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:1-3)

Faithful men do not deal in second hand goods, or debate about matters of doubtful disputation. They tell what they know, report what they have seen, and teach what they have been taught of God. I take no license with the Scriptures when I tell you that all that Luke says in verses two and three is applicable to all true gospel preachers.

"Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; 3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,"

We preach that which we have experienced by the grace of God, as eyewitnesses. We are ministers, servants of the Word of God. (2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:7). God's servants are men who have a God-given, complete, comprehensive understanding of all things spiritual.

When Luke says that he had “*perfect understanding of all things,*” he was not suggesting infallible knowledge, but complete knowledge. And every servant of God, every man called and gifted of God to preach the gospel has that same knowledge of Holy Scripture. That man who has not yet learned the message of the Scriptures is not yet called and gifted of God

to be a preacher. Such a man is not apt to teach and is not fit to teach, because he has nothing worth teaching.

The words, "*from the very first*"(v. 3), should be and most commonly are translated "*from above*" (John 3:31; 19:11; James 1:17; 3:15, 17). God's servants are men who get their knowledge, their understanding, and their message from above. By the preaching of the gospel they set forth the things of God in order, in an orderly fashion, before men.

## The Word of God

*"It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus"* (v. 3). — Third, Luke here teaches us that the Bible is the Book of God's writing, the inspired Word of God. In their strict sense, these words must be understood as a claim to divine inspiration. Most commentators, especially the modern men who love to appear intellectual, try to prove that Luke used this source or that as the historic basis for his gospel narrative. Such speculations tend to undermine our sense of the Bible's divine inspiration and authority as the Word of God. This Book is the Book of God, given to us by supernatural, divine inspiration. Let us always reverence it, not as the word of men, but as the very Word of God himself (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

Because the Bible is the Word of God, let us always bow to it, submitting our reason, learning and experience, our emotions, traditions and prejudices to the Scriptures. If we see something in the Bible that we cannot understand or reconcile with some other passage of Scripture, the fault is not with the Word of God, but with our puny brains.

## To Make Us Wise unto Salvation

Fourthly, we are here taught that the purpose of God in giving us his Word is to make us wise unto salvation. Blessed are they

who, like Timothy, have grace bestowed upon them by which they know "*the holy scriptures, which are able to make them wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*" (2 Timothy 3:15).

"It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (vv. 3-4).

"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:31)

"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." (1 John 5:10-13)

Jesus Christ is God's Salvation. This great salvation is the gift of God's grace. God gives it to every sinner who believes the record he gave concerning his Son. Will you believe God; or will you die in your sins? God help you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

# Chapter 3

## When God Broke His Long Silence

Luke 1:5-12

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were *now* well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest’s office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest’s office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him” (Luke 1:5-12).

For four hundred years no one on earth had received any word from God. For four hundred years no prophet had been inspired to write a word of Inspiration. For four hundred years no angel had been sent from heaven to earth with a message from God to man. No revelation had been given, no vision had been granted. No word had come from God in four hundred years. Then, God spoke again! God chose one man and sent his angel to him with glad tidings from the throne of God. No one had heard from God

since the days of the prophet Malachi. Then God spoke.

Can you imagine what it must have been like to have been a man, faithful, devout, serving God in his appointed place, knowing that no one had heard from heaven in four hundred years, then, suddenly, to have an angel of the Lord to appear to you alone with a word of divine Revelation? That is what we have before us in this passage.

The first thing recorded in Luke's gospel is the appearance an angel to one of the ordinary priests in Israel, named Zacharias. The angel announced to this old man that his wife, who was an old woman, well past the age of child-bearing, was, by direct, divine intervention, going to have a son, and that his son would be the forerunner of the long-awaited Messiah.

What a great word of grace! It was too good for this old man to believe. Being a faithful man, Zacharias knew that God had promised four hundred years before this that when Messiah came some man, in the spirit and power of Elijah would go before him to prepare his way before the people (Malachi 3:1).

It is, I am sure, impossible for us 2000 years later to grasp what an astounding thing this was. God made the promise four hundred years earlier. Then the heavens were silent. Not another Word was given. Then, suddenly, without any preparatory work, God sent his angel to a certain old man to tell him that Daniel's prophetic weeks were about to be fulfilled. "*Messiah, the Prince*" was about to be revealed (Daniel 9:25). That "*seed*" of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, was about to come (Genesis 22:18). "*The Desire of all nations*" who would fill the house of God with glory would soon be revealed from heaven (Haggai 2:7). Though we cannot begin to grasp the magnitude of this great revelation given to such a man in such circumstances, there are several things in the verses before us to instruct our souls.

## Divine Election

*First*, we have before us an example of divine election. God the

Holy Spirit tells us that God sent his angel to “*a certain priest named Zacharias, of the order of Abia.*” God did not send his angel to the High Priest. God did not send his angel to all the priests. But God sent his angel to “*a certain priest named Zacharias.*” Let men and women fuss and squirm as they may, the Book of God teaches the doctrine of God’s sovereign electing grace. God almighty, in all his works of grace, chooses some and passes by others, according to the good pleasure of his will.

God has, from old eternity, chosen some certain sinners, as the objects of his love and grace, to be the heirs of eternal life; and at the appointed time of love, he sends his angel (a gospel preacher) to announce to them the good news of his salvation in Christ.

He not only sends a preacher with the message of grace, he sends his Spirit to bring the Word of grace home to the heart of his elect by the omnipotent power of his irresistible grace (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; 2 Timothy 1:9-10).

When God has a special work to do, he has certain men especially and specifically chosen to do the work. Usually, those men who are chosen of God for very special things are the men who we would consider the least likely. Zacharias was one of the common, everyday priests, from the course of Abia.<sup>1</sup> He was probably unknown by name to anyone, except a small circle of friends, family, and acquaintances.

God knows where his chosen servants are. He knows what he will do with them. And when the time comes for them to perform his work, he calls them to it and equips them for it.

## “Righteous before God”

*Second*, Zacharias and Elizabeth set before us the character of the righteous. We are told that “*they were both righteous before*

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1 When the temple was built there were twenty-four courses (classes) of priests. The course of Abia was the eighth of the twenty-four (1 Chronicles 24:10).

God.” They were not naturally righteous. The Word of God tells us plainly that *“There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth. There is none that seeketh after God. We are all gone out of the way. We are together become unprofitable. There is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Romans 3:10-12).

Zacharias and Elizabeth were made righteous by the grace of God, by the righteousness of Christ being imputed to them in justification and imparted to them in sanctification, in the new birth. These two things go hand in hand. None are sanctified but those who have been justified by Christ. And all who were justified at Calvary are, at God’s appointed time of grace, sanctified by the Holy Spirit in regeneration.

Both Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth were *“righteous before God.”* Theirs was not merely the outward righteousness of the Pharisees before men, but that righteousness which stands before God and is accepted of him. They were righteous in God’s sight. And they were *“both righteous before God.”* What a blessed home that is in which both a man and his wife are the recipients of God’s grace in Christ, when both walk together before God in the paths of righteousness!

*“They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.”* — This believing couple, this old man and woman here show us the character of true faith. True faith walks in obedience to the Word of God. It is written, *“He that doeth righteousness is righteous”* (1 John 3:7). Believers are men and women who, in the habit of their lives, in the tenor of their lives, live in submission and obedience to the revealed will of God. God’s saints are not rebels.

Not only is it true that God’s saints live righteously in the tenor of their lives, the Spirit of God tells us plainly that that new man *“created in righteousness and true holiness,”* that new nature in us that *“is born of God doth not commit sin”* and *“cannot sin, because it is born of God”* (Ephesians 4:24; 1 John 3:9).

Here is another trait found in God's saints. They submit to and keep the ordinances of divine worship. These two old saints kept the ordinances of divine worship in a day when few in Israel did. To most, the ordinances of divine worship were a burden they did not care to bear. But Zacharias and Elizabeth delighted in them. God's people still do. Believing men and women confess Christ in believer's baptism, assemble with God's saints in public worship and remember the Redeemer together in the sweet communion of God's family at the Lord's Table.

Moreover, they were blameless in their behavior before men. John Gill correctly gives this meaning to that word "*blameless.*" — "They were so strict in their lives and conduct that none of their acquaintances had any just reason to reproach them."

### A Crook in the Lot

*Third*, in verse seven, we see that there is a crook in the lot of every believer. The lot of the believer is a blessed lot. The life of faith in Christ is a life of joy and gladness. We are the people blessed of the Lord. In this doomed, damned, sin-cursed world, we have a good hope through grace of eternal life in Christ. But there is a crook in the lot of us all. In this world, it has pleased our God to lay trials upon his people, sometimes heavy trials, by which he is resolved to try and prove our faith, trials by which he will ultimately make our faith to shine.

For Zacharias and Elizabeth the trial was the barrenness of Elizabeth's womb. We read in verse 7 — "*And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.*" This was the crook in their lot. We can hardly fathom how heavy a trial that was in ancient times. In those days, to be childless was a shameful thing to a man and one of the most bitter sorrows a woman could endure (1 Samuel 1:10).

The grace of God does not exempt us from trials and troubles, heartaches and sorrows in this world. Not even exemplary faithfulness, to the point of blamelessness will keep us from the trials of faith. If we follow Christ, we must never consider it some strange thing when God tries our faith. This is the portion

of our cup, given to us by the infinite wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father, by which he chastens us, “*that we may be partakers of his holiness*” (Hebrews 12:5-11). We may not think so at the time, but our trials are great blessings of grace, by which our ever-gracious God drive us into the arms of Christ, drives us to our knees in prayer, and drives us to the Scriptures. In the world to come we will see them in better light than we do now (James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:7).

## Place of Blessing

*Fourth*, we see in verses 8-11 that the place of divine blessing is the house of our God, the house of prayer.

“And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest’s office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest’s office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.”

Let me be crystal clear here. There is nothing we can do which will automatically secure God’s blessings. Sacramental religion is utter idolatry. You will not automatically be blessed of God by church attendance, Bible reading, or even prayer. Yet, the Word of God does specifically tell us that God has ordained a place of worship, and that he commonly meets his people in the place of worship which he has established.

In the typical, ceremonial days of the Old Testament, the Lord God established his worship first in the tabernacle in the wilderness, then in the temple. He promised to meet sinners upon the mercy-seat, in the holy of holies, on the Day of Atonement (Exodus 25:22). He did, from time to time, visit and meet with sinners in other places; but he never promised to meet a man anywhere else; and no one could expect to meet him anywhere else.

It was Zacharias' privilege and responsibility to burn incense in the house of God, in the holy place every morning and every evening (Exodus 30:1, 7, 8). That might not seem like much of a job in the eyes of men; but it was the job God gave him, and he did it faithfully, even when he was an old man. Others may have looked upon it as a meaningless religious ritual; but Zacharias considered it his highest honor. He went about his duty, serving and worshipping the Lord God, purely for his glory.

And what a privilege his work was! That altar of incense which he kept burning day and night was typical of the unceasing intercession of Christ for us as our great High Priest, who lives forever to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

The Lord God sent his angel to Zacharias with the good news of Messiah's coming, the good news that he who would be the forerunner of our Redeemer, Savior and King, was about to be born to his own wife Elizabeth. Where was this old man when God met him? What was he doing when the Lord sent his angel to him and so greatly blessed him? — He was in the house of God. — He was worshipping God. — He was doing that which God had given him the privilege of doing for the glory of his name and the good of his people.

You and I cannot expect God's blessings upon us, upon our own souls, or upon our families, we cannot expect God to meet us, speak to us, or honor us, if we wilfully despise his will and his worship (1 Samuel 2:30; Hebrews 10:23-29).

There is only one place where the Son of God promises he will meet with, speak to, and reveal himself to his people, and that place is the assembly of his saints, gathered in his name (Matthew 18:20). This place, the church of the living God, the assembly of sinners saved by the grace of God, is called "*the house of God*" and "*the temple of God,*" because that is where God meets with his people. To neglect his house, his worship, his Word, and the assembly of his saints is to despise him

## Angelic Interest

*Fifth*, we are once more shown that which is the single great interest and concern of the holy angels. Countless books have been written about angels. Most of them reveal the utter ignorance and superstition of the authors and tell us nothing about the angels of God. The simple fact is, we do not know much about them. But the one thing that is clearly revealed about them is completely missed by most who write about them.

The Scriptures plainly and repeatedly show us that the angels of God have only one great, singular interest and concern. They seem to care about only one thing. These holy creatures who cry continually before the throne of God, "*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts,*" do not seem to care about anything except that one great work of God by which his glory is revealed and made known.

These holy creatures have a deep, abiding, all-consuming interest in the redemptive work of Christ and the salvation of God's elect in him. The angels always stand before the throne of grace, looking upon the mercy-seat (Isaiah 6). An angel announced the birth of John the Baptist, our Lord's forerunner. An angel announced the birth of Christ, and a chorus of angels sang when he came into this world to save us. When our Savior was tempted, the angels of God ministered to him. The angels of God are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be the heirs of God's salvation (Hebrews 1:14). The angels of heaven gather with God's saints to learn from redeemed sinners "*the manifold wisdom of God*" displayed in our redemption by Christ (Ephesians 3:10). The angels rejoice in the presence of our God every time God saves a sinner by his grace. The angels of God will come with Christ at the last day to gather his elect from the four corners of the earth into everlasting glory.

J.C. Ryle wrote, "Let us strive to be like them, while we are upon earth, to be of their mind and to share their joys. This is the way to be in tune for heaven. It is written of those who enter in there, that they shall be '*as the angels.*'"

May God the Holy Spirit give us grace to imitate the angels

of God in this. Let us make the redeeming work of Christ and the salvation of sinners in him the all-consuming interest of our hearts and lives.

## Perfect Holiness and Sinful Man

*Sixth*, as we read verse 12, we see the effect perfect holiness has upon a sinful man. — “*When Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.*” Zacharias was a righteous man in Christ; but he was a sinful man by nature, and he knew it. When he stood before a perfectly holy angel, his soul quaked within him. We have seen this scene repeated many times in Scripture. Moses trembled before the burning bush. Manoah and his wife were fearful because the Angel of the Lord appeared to them. Daniel quaked as he stood before the Lord at the great river Hiddekel. The omen who saw the angel at the empty tomb were fearful. John fell before the face of the angel that spoke to him on Patmos. They all, like Zacharias, when they saw holy angels and visions of things belonging to the world of eternal things, they trembled with fear.

If these who were made holy by the grace of God trembled in the presence of holy angels, how do you hope to stand before the august presence of God’s infinite holiness (Nahum 1:5-6) in the Day of Judgment? The only hope there is for our poor souls is Christ, the only Mediator between God and men. All who take refuge in him, all who trust him, shall stand without sin and without fear before the august majesty of God’s perfect holiness, with clean hands and pure hearts...

“With His spotless garments on  
As holy as the Holy One.”

# Chapter 4

## A Man Filled with the Holy Ghost from His Mother's Womb

Luke 1:13-17

“But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, 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” (Luke 1:13-17).

John the Baptist was a remarkable man, a man separated and distinguished from other men by the hand of God even before he was born. In Luke 1:13-17 we are allowed to hear the message the angel Gabriel delivered to his father Zacharias in the temple before he was born, before he was even conceived in his mother's womb. It is a message full of spiritual instruction. May God the Holy Spirit seal it to our hearts.

That which stands out most prominently in these verses and the lessons they are intended to convey is the fact that God's ways are not our ways. That fact should never surprise us. The Lord has shown us in his Word and by experience that “*as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than*

our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). As Cowper wrote,

“God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform.  
He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.”

## Our Prayers and God's Answers

The first lesson in this passage is a lesson about prayer. I hope we will all lay it to heart. God's answers to our prayers are often delayed for a long, long time. Sometimes, perhaps most often, the Lord graciously and wisely delays answering our prayers for many, many years. That certainly was the case with Zacharias and Elizabeth. No doubt, they had often prayed for the Lord to give them a child. It looked as though they had prayed in vain. Now, they were old people. The thought of having children had completely vanished from their minds. They had ceased long ago mentioning this matter to the Lord. Yet, the very first words that fell from the lips of the angel to this old man were, "*Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.*"

We must never attempt to prescribe to our God how or when to do anything. He knows and does what is best, in the best way, and at the best time. He knows the best time for his people to be born; and he knows the best time for them to be born again.

And we should never conclude that our prayers are not answered because they are not answered in the way or at the time we desire. Do not conclude that the Lord ignores your supplications because he does not immediately gratify your desires. Prayer has something to do with believing God; and the Lord often tries our faith in him by delaying our requests.

Prayer also has something to do with seeking and submitting to the will of God. Prayer is not simply bombarding God with our desires, be they ever so sincere. Prayer is seeking the will and glory of God, bowing our will to his will. It may be that the Lord

sometimes delays our requests, not because he does not intend to answer them, but because he is determined to make us willing for him not to answer them.

The fact is none of us know what to pray for as we ought. The experience of the Apostle Paul recorded in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10 certainly teaches this. Because we do not know what is best, we do not know how to pray for anything as we ought. It is written, "*We know not what we should pray for as we ought*" (Romans 8:26).

Prayer is not for the gratification of our carnal lusts. It is not the means by which we obtain what we want from the Lord. Prayer, true prayer involves submission to the will of God. It is the cry of the believer's heart to his heavenly Father to do what is right and best. If I am God's child, if truly I know him and trust him, I want what he has purposed. I bow to him, surrendering my will to his will, my desires to his purpose, my pleasure to his glory, knowing that his will is best. Therefore, when we pray (in our ignorance), the Holy Spirit cleans up our prayers and presents to the Father the true groanings of our hearts (Romans 8:26).

Paul tells us plainly that though the Lord graciously refused give him what he asked for, he graciously granted him what he really wanted and needed. John Gill wrote...

"The Lord always hears and answers his people sooner or later, in one form or another, though not always in the way and manner they desire; but yet in such a way as is most for his glory and their good. The apostle had not his request granted, that Satan might immediately depart from him, only he is assured of a sufficiency of grace to support him under the exercise, so long as it should last."

Our Lord Jesus taught us ever to surrender our will to the Father's will. When the will of God appears to contradict that which might appear to be most pleasing to our flesh, we ought always to follow our Master's example, saying, "*Not my will, thy will be done.*" (John 12:27-28). I repeat, we do not now what is best for us, best for the glory of God, best for his kingdom, or best for the accomplishment of his purpose. Let us, therefore,

wisely bow to his will in all things (Romans 8:26).

## Grace for Our Children

Look at verses 14 and 15, and learn a second thing. Here is a lesson all parents should always bear in mind. Grace must be the principle thing we seek for our sons and daughters.

“And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.”

What a blessed word this is from God! Zacharias was assured, before his son was born, that his only son would be numbered among the sons of God!<sup>2</sup>

What more could any parent desire? Nothing can give a believing father and mother greater joy than to see their sons and daughters experience, possess and walk in the grace of God. Just before promising this old man that his son would be filled with the Holy Ghost, the angel of the Lord said to Zacharias, not only are you going to have a son, you are going to have a son who is chosen of God, “*And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth!*”

Above all things, seek grace for your children. Beauty, brilliance, wealth and honor, even health and happiness are utterly insignificant when compared to this. Our sons and daughters need Christ. They need the grace of God in Christ. Let us seek, earnestly seek, the grace of God in Christ for our children. Happy indeed is that father who is assured upon good grounds that his son or daughter is chosen of God, redeemed by Christ and born of the Spirit!

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<sup>2</sup> Let all those who are blessed of God with the burden of caring for children with limited mental capacity, or who have lost children in infancy, be cheered with this fact. — God has granted you the rare privilege of being assured that you have a child who will be numbered among the redeemed in Glory.

## True Greatness

The third lesson is a lesson about true greatness. It is found in verse 15. True greatness is greatness in the sight of the Lord. — *“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord.”*

Men always measure greatness by a very short stick. That which men call greatness is nothing. Politicians and presidents, doctors and lawyers, philosophers and statesmen, artists and authors, athletes and movie stars — all who are called and admired as great by little fools are utterly insignificant to the angels of God. Those who are great before men, they count nothing. Those who are great in the sight of God, they count great. We will be wise to learn to measure greatness the way they measure it. The angels of God measure greatness by God’s measuring stick.

Let us seek for ourselves and our children this true greatness, greatness before God, greatness in the world to come, greatness forever. What is this greatness in the sight of God? It is...

- The Greatness of Grace.
- The Greatness of Divine Approval.
- The Greatness of Faith.
- The Greatness of All Who Believe.
- The Greatness of Christ.

Our Savior said, *“Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”* (Matthew 11:11).

## Divine Sovereignty

Look at verse 15 again, and learn something about the operations of God. God always acts in total sovereignty; and his sovereignty defies explanation. Here we are told that John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb. — *“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost,*

*even from his mother's womb."*

Almost everyone presumes that to mean that John the Baptist was regenerated in his mother's womb. But that is not what the text says. Some use this as a basis for baptizing babies. Some use it as a proof text to show that God does not necessarily use the preaching of the gospel to save his elect.

Let's be honest with the Scriptures. Don't ever grab a verse or a statement, rip it out of its context, and make it mean whatever you want it to mean. We build our doctrine on the plain statements of Scripture, not on the whims of our wild imaginations.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, no more and no less (Ephesians 5:18). When the Scriptures tell us that John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, it asserts that John, like Jeremiah, was sanctified, set apart, and ordained to be the prophet of the Highest, before he came out of his mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:5). The same thing was true of the apostle Paul (Galatians 1:15-16).

While still in his mother's womb, John, under such an influence of the Spirit of God, leaped for joy at the salutation of Mary to his mother Elizabeth (Luke 1:41,44). Like David, he was under the constant protection and care of God's mercy, love, and grace, from his mother's womb (Psalm 22:9-10).

Even before he was born, God began preparing him for the work he had for him to do. God the Holy Spirit gave him special gifts and grace, qualifying him for the work for which he was chosen.

## ***God's Messengers***

In verses 16-17 we are taught something about those men who are sent of God as his messengers to men. They are God's blessings upon men. No man is a greater blessing to men than those men who are sent from God as his messengers.

"And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, 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."

That is an accurate, angelic, biblical description of the character, conduct, work, and usefulness of a gospel preacher. He, as an instrument in the hands of God, turns the hearts of men. He turns the hearts of Israel, God's elect. He turns them from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light, from superstition to revelation, from unbelief to faith, and from sin to righteousness.

Obviously, the work of turning sinners to Christ is the work of God our Creator, not the work of a man; but the Spirit of God here describes it as the work of a man, because it is a work God performs by human instrumentality, by the instrumentality of gospel preaching (Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25; James 1:18).

The messenger of grace goes before the Lord, walks before God in the Spirit and power of Elijah, seeking God's message, God's grace and God's will for his people, seeking God's glory, and serving to build God's kingdom. By the preaching of the gospel, he makes ready a people for the Lord, prepares chosen, redeemed sinners to meet the Lord at his appearing.

The gospel preacher is a man sent from God, filled with the Holy Ghost, proclaiming God's salvation. — *"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"*

These are the men we need. These are the men God uses. Blessed are those people to whom God sends such men! By them, God calls out his elect. By them, Christ is uplifted and glorified. By them, God leads his people.

# Chapter 5

## Unbelief

### Luke 1:18-25

“And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among men” (Luke 1:18-25).

Here is Zacharias, a man of great faith and faithfulness, stricken dumb by the angel of God because of his unbelief. One of the first corruptions of the human race was the horrible sin of unbelief. It is recorded in Genesis chapter three that our mother, Eve, being beguiled by the serpent, was persuaded to unbelief. She believed the devil’s lie without reason and did not believe God, whom she had every reason to believe. Such is the natural

wickedness of the human heart that we are all naturally inclined to believe the devil's lie regarding all things, without the slightest justification for doing so, and naturally inclined not to believe God, when we have every reason for doing so.

Unbelief is an original and universal corruption of all men. It is the deepest seated of all corruption. And it is at once the worst of all corruptions and the father of all other corruptions. If pride is the mother of all sin, unbelief is the father.

Yes, I did say, unbelief is the worst of all the corruptions of fallen humanity. Nothing so highly honors God as believing him; and nothing so vilely dishonors God as unbelief. Yet, horrible as this offense is, it is the sin we most readily excuse in rebels and most easily justify in ourselves. May God the Holy Spirit unmask this devil who yet resides in us all, expose his ugly face, and inspire our hearts to oppose him with vengeance.

## **1. Unbelief is found in the hearts of the strongest believers.**

Zacharias was a truly remarkable man. He believed God when very few did. He worshipped God in Spirit when almost all around him were entirely given over to ceremonialism. Yet, when Gabriel told him that his wife would soon bear him a son, this faithful old man said, "Oh, no. You must be mistaken. Not my wife. I'm too old and she is too" (v. 18).

Why did Zacharias not believe the angel's message? It was because the angel's message was totally contrary to human reason, experience and science. The basis of faith is divine revelation; but the basis of unbelief is human reason. As J.C. Ryle, put it, "Where reason begins, faith ends."

This well instructed priest in Israel had read in the Book of God about Abraham, Sarah and Isaac. He knew about God's wonders with Manoah and his wife, and the birth of Samson. He was aware of what God did for Hannah. Zacharias knew all those historic facts better than we do. He knew very well that the Lord our God is the sovereign, omnipotent Monarch of the universe.

He knew that with God nothing is impossible. He knew that the God who could cause the sun to go backwards ten degrees could easily reverse the aging process of an old woman's womb.

There was nothing wrong with Zacharias' doctrine. The problem was with his heart. When it came to the personal, practical application of divine truth to his own life and his own experience, Zacharias, this man of great faith, was overcome with unbelief! But we must not be too hard on old Zacharias. His fault is the common fault of us all. All God's people on this earth are plagued with unbelief. It is a fault, a sin, a horrible evil in us all. The histories of Abraham, Lot, Moses and Peter stand as glaring beacons to warn us, to make us aware of this monstrous devil which resides in us all. Let us pray, honestly and earnestly, like the poor, distraught father in Mark 9, "*Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!*"

How our unbelief must shock the angels of God. It was this same angel, Gabriel, who 490 years earlier brought a message from the throne of God to Daniel, assuring him of the coming and redemptive accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ, who would be cut off as the sinners' Substitute, not for his own sins, but for ours (Daniel 9:26). Daniel believed God's word. Daniel, a prisoner at Babylon, without one shred of external evidence, believed God! But Zacharias, who virtually lived in the temple, who had the entire Old Testament, with all the recorded miracles wrought by God, when that same angel spoke to him, turned his heart not toward God and his Word, but toward his own life experiences and learned reason. Therefore, he was filled with unbelief.

God no longer speaks to men by angels (Hebrews 1:1-3), though they were frequently messengers of mercy in days gone by. Still, the Lord God does have angels today (pastors - Revelation 1-3), by whom he speaks to men upon the earth, by whom he shows fallen men his wonders (Psalms 96:3-4; 105:3-7). But our unbelief puts a heavy, dark, thick veil over the Word of God. Unbelief hides the glory of God from us (John 11:40). Unbelief holds back the blessings of God from us (Isaiah 48:16-19). And Unbelief keeps the Lord from performing his mighty

works among us (Mark 6:3-6). Obviously, God's will and God's work is not thwarted or even slightly impeded by our unbelief. Yet, the Scriptures make it plain that a man's unbelief is an evil for which he is responsible. Faith is God's gift and operation. Unbelief is our sin.

## 2. No sin is more vile, reprehensible and dishonoring to God than unbelief.

As nothing dishonors God like unbelief, so nothing provokes him to wrath and judgment like unbelief.

“While it is said, today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? *Was it* not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left *us* of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.” (Hebrews 3:15-4:1-3)

What is it that makes unbelief such a base, vile thing? Unbelief is a denial of God's power a denial of his Word, and a denial of his veracity (1 John 5:9-11). By unbelief, man asserts that God is a liar!

## 3. Unbelief, perhaps more than anything else, compels our heavenly father to use his rod of correction upon

his children.

God never punishes his people for sin. He punished our sins in his dear Son at Calvary. But he is a truly loving Father. As such, he chastens his children with the rod of correction (Hebrews 12:5-11). Zacharias' unbelief brought the Father's rod down heavily upon him. He was stricken deaf<sup>3</sup> and dumb by the hand of God for at least nine long months. Divine chastisement is sometimes lengthy; but always suitable. The ears that refused to hear God's Word were stricken deaf, until Zacharias learned to hearken to the Word of God. The tongue that refused to speak God's praise was tied, until it learned to speak forth Jehovah's praise.

#### 4. Unbelief will bring sinners to eternal ruin.

"The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:35-36)

Yes, faith is the gift of God. No one can believe, except God give him faith. Yet, unbelief is the deliberate, willful choice of rebels. And God will not hold any guiltless for their rebellion against him and his Son.

#### 5. All unbelief will soon come to an end.

The Lord God will soon cause all men to see all truth with absolute clarity. In that day, those who perish in unbelief will be convinced of all truth, but brought into everlasting contempt. And, blessed be his name, in that day, when the Lord visits us again as he did Elizabeth of old (vv. 24-25), he will take away our reproach forever. Thanks be unto our God, we will not

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3 The fact that others communicated to him with signs (v. 62) implies that he was deaf as well as dumb.

forever struggle with these evil hearts of unbelief!

Until that day, let us watch and pray against this terrible sin, by which our God is so greatly dishonored. Unbelief robs us of peace. Unbelief makes our knees weak and our hands heavy. Unbelief takes the joy out of our salvation. Unbelief destroys patience. Unbelief makes contentment impossible. It is written, "*If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established*" (Isaiah 7:9). Let us seek grace from our God to trust him implicitly, for the glory of his name. Unbelief trembles before a maid. Faith slays Goliath. Unbelief trembles in a thunderstorm. Faith sleeps in a lions' den. Unbelief paces the floor. Faith believes God. Unbelief dishonors our God. Faith honors him.

# Chapter 6

## The Greatness of Our Savior

### Luke 1:26-33

“And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name *was* Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women. And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:26-33).

The verses before us contain the most sublime things ever revealed to men. May God the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with wonder, faith, love, and praise as we now behold the wonders of God’s grace here set before us.

### Christ’s Humiliation

Everything connected with our Savior’s incarnation displays his great humiliation as our Mediator. Gabriel was sent to an obscure town in Galilee called Nazareth. All of Galilee was looked upon

by the Jews with contempt; and the most contemptible village in the region was Nazareth. It was a common thought among them that nothing good could come out of Nazareth (John 1:46). Mary, the woman chosen to be the mother of our Lord's human body and nature, was a very poor woman from a very poor area. There was nothing about her that the world would consider enviable or great.

Everything involved in the incarnation of our Savior was arranged and brought to pass by God's wise and good providence. He who orders all things in heaven, earth and hell according to his own sovereign will chose a poor, despised woman in a poor despised village to be the vessel by which he would send our Savior into this world.

What a great stoop the God of glory made when he stooped to save us from our sins! — "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Our Savior's great love for us, that love that constrained him to take our nature into union with himself that he might live and die as our Substitute, ought to constrain us to love him and live not for ourselves, but for him who loved us and gave himself for us. Let us in all things have the mind of Christ and follow his example. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not!"

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:5-8) — "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 13:15) —

"*Be* of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." (Romans 12:16)

Let us seek grace from our God to live continually in the spirit of Christ, with the mind of Christ, for the benefit of God's elect. As our Lord Jesus identified himself with our poverty, both spiritually and materially, let us never despise poverty in others, or be ashamed of it in ourselves, if the Lord brings us into such a condition. Riches make no one honorable; and poverty makes no one dishonorable. Men groveling for riches and honor remind me of a dog digging for moles. The filthy rodent just isn't worth the dig.

### Saving Grace

God's choice of Mary stands in Holy Scripture as a beautiful picture of his sovereign, saving grace to needy sinners.

“To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name *was* Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women. And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God” (vv. 27-30).

Romanism places Mary on the highest pedestal imaginable, making her a mediatrix, or a co-mediator with Christ, ascribing to her an immaculate nature and divine power. When the previous pope was shot, he ascribed his recovery from the assassin's bullet not to God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit, but to Mary. Such veneration of Mary is utterly contemptible idolatry. It must never be honored as an acceptable thing. Such idolatry is not Christian, but pagan.

Mary is never presented as an immaculate, sinless woman, but as a sinner saved by grace, just like you and me. This she gladly acknowledged. We read in Luke 1:46-47, “*And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*”

It is true, she is called "*a virgin*;" but she is never referred to as "the virgin." Her virginity is mentioned repeatedly in the Scriptures, not so much to honor her<sup>4</sup> as it is to declare the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world as the woman's Seed, by miraculous, divine intervention. The body of our Savior, that holy thing prepared in Mary's virgin womb, was specifically prepared by God the Holy Spirit to be a suitable body for our Savior to make him a sacrifice for our souls. — "*Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me*" (Hebrews 10:5).

Mary's name indicates what she was and what we all are by nature. "*Mary*" means "bitter rebel." It is the same as the name of Moses' sister, Miriam, and the name Naomi applied to herself, Mara. Yet, Mary was the object of God's sovereign, distinguishing grace.

The Lord God chose Mary for salvation and chose her for the high honor of being the mother of our Savior's humanity. Mary was not the mother of God! The words, "*highly favored*" (v. 28), would be better translated, "graciously accepted". Mary was graciously accepted of God in Christ by an act of sovereign grace, just like we are (Ephesians 1:6).<sup>5</sup> The Lord was with her, just as he is with us: to protect her, provide for her, save her and to bless her.

Mary was a woman blessed of God. — "*Blessed art thou among women!*" The word "*blessed*" is exactly the same word used to describe the blessedness of all God's elect in Christ, the distinguishing blessedness of grace. Mary was, like all who are saved by God's free grace in Christ, blessed of God in and with Christ. Like us, she was blessed of God from eternity with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, according as she was chosen in eternal, electing love. She was blessed with redemption and the free forgiveness of all her sins, as the object of God's

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4 Virginity is truly an honorable thing among women. Chastity ought always to be cherished and protected; but it does not make one honorable before God.

5 Mary was full of grace in exactly the same way every saved sinner is, by the bounty of God's grace in Christ. She was the object of grace; but she was not made the giver of grace!

covenant grace, in Christ her Mediator.

In a word, Mary found favor with God! --"*Thou hast found favor with God!*" Mary did not bless God. God blessed her. God did not find favor in Mary's eyes. Mary found favor in God's eyes. The phrase in verse 30 is exactly the same as that in verse 28. It simply means that Mary was a sinner chosen from among women as the object of God's mercy, love and grace, and blessed by him with all grace.

We must never exalt Mary above this level to a position of idolatrous envy, because believers, all believers, have a far nearer relationship to Christ than Mary enjoyed as his earthly mother. Her relationship, the relationship given to her in providence, was a purely carnal, physical, temporary relationship. Ours is a permanent, spiritual relationship. We are truly the Savior's family (Mark 3:15). Mary's great blessedness was not in her physical relationship to Christ, but in her spiritual relationship. Our Master himself tells us that it is more blessed to believe on him than to have carried him in the womb (Luke 11:27-28).

## Christ's Greatness

The primary thing revealed in this passage of Scripture is the glorious greatness of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Gabriel's announcement was no ordinary birth announcement. It was not the announcement of the birth of a mere man, but the announcement of the incarnation of God! Gabriel was sent to proclaim that God the Son was about to take humanity into union with himself, and enter into this sin cursed world to save his people from their sins. Look at what we are told in verses 31-33.

"And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

The child born from Mary's virgin womb was and is God the

Son given in human flesh (Isaiah 9:6). — “*God was manifest in the flesh*” (1 Timothy 3:16). Our Savior is Immanuel, God with us, God in our nature. None but the incarnate God could save us. And this great, incarnate God came into this world as our Mediator and covenant Surety on a specific mission: – to save his people from their sins. His name was called, “*Jesus,*” because he was sent here to “*save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21). And that which he was sent to do, that which he came to do, he has done.

As Joshua did for Israel what Moses never could, so the Lord Jesus Christ, our Joshua, did what the law could never do. –He brought us to God!

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1-4).

In Luke 1:32-33 we are given a fivefold declaration of our Savior’s greatness.

1. “*He shall be great.*” — Great in all his offices. – Greater than all who went before him. — And greater than all who come after him.
2. He “*shall be called the Son of the Highest.*” — Our Lord Jesus Christ is God the Son.
3. “*The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.*” – Our Savior has won the right to rule the universe as our God-man Mediator (Psalm 2:8; John 17:2; Romans 14:9).
4. “*And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever.*” — He is the Head of his body, the Church and her King as well.
5. “*And of his kingdom there shall be no end.*” —

The Lord Jesus did not come here to rule as a King over that little piece of land called "Israel" for a few hundred years. He rules as King in Zion forever!

All the kingdoms of this world have been and are designed of God only for the building of the kingdom of our God and his Christ. The kingdoms of this world are only the scaffolding by which our God builds his kingdom. Like Nineveh, Babylon, Egypt, Tyre, Carthage, Rome and the Soviet Union, all the nations and empires of this world shall perish and all men shall be made to bow before this great and glorious King, who alone shall reign forever (Philippians 2:9-11; Daniel 7:14, 27).

# Chapter 7

## “How can these things be?”

Luke 1:34-38

“Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her” (Luke 1:34-38).

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced God’s grace and mercy to her. He told her that she had been chosen of God to be that virgin through whom the Messiah would come into the world, by whom the Seed of woman would come, through whom God the Father would send his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to save his people from their sins.

God the Spirit has recorded for our learning all that is needful for our soul’s edification regarding the mystery of the incarnation of our blessed Savior in the few verses before us. I call your attention to six things in these verses.

### The Wonder of Faith

Earlier in this chapter (vv. 18-20), we saw that when Zacharias asked, “*Whereby shall I know this?*”, his question was an

expression of unbelief. Yet, when Mary asked virtually the same thing, her question was an expression of faith (v. 45). Zacharias asked what he did because he looked upon the promise of God as a thing impossible. Mary asked what she did because she looked upon the promise of God as astonishing.

*“Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”* — Mary’s words are an expression of admiration. She knew that the Son of God was coming into the world in human flesh, that Messiah must come into the world as a woman’s seed, untainted by Adam’s transgression, that God was going to send his Son into the world through the womb of a virgin; and now she knew that she was that virgin!

These words expressed her desire to know how the Lord would do this great, wondrous thing. She did not question the fact that God would do as he said. She simply desired to know how he would do it. She did not doubt that the Lord would do what he said. She simply desired to know how he would do it.

Mary could not imagine how such an amazing work could be accomplished, since she was indeed a virgin, as she put it, *“Seeing I know not a man.”* True faith often expresses itself in words of amazement and astonishment. David was astonished at God’s promise to him and his house, but he believed the promise (2 Samuel 7). Mephibosheth was astonished that David would look on such a dead dog as he thought himself to be before such a magnificent king; but he believed David’s word. So it is with God’s people. We often ask, “Why would the Lord love me?” “Why would he choose me?” “Why would Christ die for me?” “How can God use me?” Yet, we believe that which the Lord God has revealed in his Word.

## The Mystery of The Incarnation

In response to Mary’s question, Gabriel explained the mystery of the incarnation with absolute reverence, using the simplest words possible to declare the most profound mystery in the universe.

“And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall

come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (v. 35).

We ought always to follow this angelic example of utter reverence regarding the things of God. Vain questions, carnal debate, idle speculations about holy things are utterly out of place. Divine things are divine. They are to be treated as divine. Here is the great mystery of godliness. “*God was manifest in the flesh!*” — “*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*” Robert Hawker rightly observed...

“The Word of God teacheth, that all the persons of the Godhead were engaged in the formation of the human nature of Christ. Concerning God the Father, it was said by Christ, under the spirit of prophecy, ages before his incarnation: *A body hast thou prepared me.* Compare Psalm 40:6 with Hebrews 10:5. And that God the Son had a hand in it is evident, for the Holy Ghost by *Paul* saith; that He *took* not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of *Abraham*. And again, He *took* of flesh and blood. Hebrews 2:14 & 16. And in this Chapter we have the wonderful relation of the part which God the Holy Ghost had in the work, in his *overshadowing power.*”

When God sent his Son into this world, a body as prepared for him called, “*that holy thing,*” in which our redemption could be accomplished (Hebrews 10:5). He took part of our flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14). He became what we are. When he came into this world, he took hold of the seed of Abraham (Hebrews 2:15), took hold on his covenant people to save them.

This great Savior was “*made of a woman*” (Galatians 4:4-6). Yet, our great Savior is himself God (Colossians 2:9). What more should be said? What more can be said. To go beyond these simple statements of divine Revelation would be to foolishly rush in where angels fear to tread and darken counsel by words without knowledge.

## The Work of the Triune God

“And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (v. 35).

As the incarnation was a work involving all three persons in the Triune God, the salvation of our souls is the work of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We were chosen by God the Father in eternal election, purchased by God the Son in effectual redemption, and sanctified by God the Spirit in sovereign regeneration.

Yet, we must not fail to notice the unique work of God the Spirit, with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ. As God the Father always points to and glorifies Christ, so God the Spirit always points us to and glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ.

Did God the Son come into this world in human flesh? It was God the Spirit who prepared a body for him in the womb of a virgin. Did the Lord Jesus die to make atonement for our sins? It is written that he “*through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God*” (Hebrews 9:14). Did the crucified Christ rise from the dead for our justification? It is written, “*He was justified in the Spirit*” (1 Timothy 3:16). Our Redeemer was “*quickened by the Spirit*” (1 Peter 3:18). Does the Prince of Peace give comfort to his people? It is by the Holy Spirit who is our Comforter. Does Christ our Prophet teach us? It is by the Spirit of Truth. In all things, especially in the affair of our salvation, the Triune God is one.

## The Condescension of Grace

Our God is so gracious, so good, so merciful that he condescends to help our weaknesses. Grace anticipates our weakness and inability. We see this beautifully set forth in verse 36. Though Mary believed God’s promise, though she asked for no sign, the

Lord condescended to encourage her faith, by telling her of another miraculous birth by which God would fulfil his prophetic Word. — “*And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.*”

As soon as Mary found herself with child she took off to see her cousin, Elizabeth. How they must have helped one another. Both were in embarrassing, difficult situations. While they were together, they ministered to one another and encouraged one another in the worship of God, celebrating his goodness and his grace.

## The Omnipotence of Our God

Here is the pillar of our confidence, the strength of our faith, and the solace of our souls in all things! — “*With God nothing shall be impossible*” (v. 37). Our peace in this world, our confidence regarding the purposes, promises and grace of our God stand and fall with our firm persuasion of our heavenly Father’s absolute omnipotence.

With our God, nothing is impossible! He who called the universe into being by the mere exercise of his will, he who created all things out of nothing by the hiding of his power, he who upholds all things by the word of his power can perform all his purposes, all his promises and all that we need, at all times!

That which is impossible with us is a piece of cake for our God. Nothing is too hard for the Lord! — “*With God all things are possible*” (Mark 10:27). I cannot express the message of verse 37 any better than J.C. Ryle did in his Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Luke. Ryle wrote...

“There is no sin too black and bad to be pardoned. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. There is no heart too hard and wicked to be changed. The heart of stone can be made a heart of flesh. There is no work too hard for a believer to do. We may do all things through Christ strengthening us. There is no trial too hard to be borne.

The grace of God is sufficient for us. There is no promise too great to be fulfilled. Christ's words shall never pass away, and what he has promised he is able to perform. There is no difficulty too great for a believer to overcome. When God is for us, who shall be against us? The mountains shall become as a plain. Faith never rests so calmly and peacefully as when it lays its head on the pillow of God's omnipotence."

Our great and glorious God is the omnipotent God, the God of omnipotent ability to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Child of God, be assured, "*With God nothing shall be impossible!*" He is able to complete the work of his grace in you. He is able to keep you. He is able to save you to the uttermost (Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25).

The Lord is King! Who then shall dare  
Resist His will, distrust His care,  
Or murmur at His wise decrees,  
Or doubt His royal promises?

'Til God all-wise can make mistakes,  
His pow'r abate, His love forsake,  
His children must not cease to sing –  
The Lord Omnipotent is King!

If indeed we believe God, if indeed our God is omnipotent, surrendering ourselves to him in all things should be in our minds the simplest, most reasonable thing in this world. Oh, may God give us grace to follow Mary's example in this matter. In verse 38, she shows us by humble example...

### The Surrender of Faith.

"*And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.*" — The great privilege granted to Mary, like all truly great privileges, involved (at least for the present) great and costly difficulty. Though it would ultimately be her everlasting honor, for the present, Mary knew her honorable name and reputation, her

marriage to a good and honorable man, and her respect from family and friend alike would very possibly be in jeopardy. These things presented no small trial to her faith. But, believing God, for the honor of God, to do the will of God, Mary was willing to risk everything. She raised no objections. She asked no questions. She asked no favors. She simply bowed to the will of God, with ready and willing heart.

May God be pleased to give me such grace, that I may be willing to go anywhere, endure anything, and do anything, whatever the cost, in obedience to his will, for the glory of Christ. Faith is most noble when it yields blind obedience to the will of God.

# Chapter 8

## A Visit to the Hill Country

### Luke 1:39-45

“And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed *art* thou among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of thy womb. And whence *is* this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed *is* she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luke 1:39-45).

When I was a boy, there was one delightful ray of sunshine in my dark life, one thing which was always sure to give me a season of pure pleasure and happiness. At least once a year, I would get to go for a week or more to the mountains to visit my dad’s family. My grandmother, great aunt, and my aunts and uncles were always a pleasure to be around. I remember dreaming, with delightful anticipation, about going to the hills of Spruce Pine, North Carolina. The happiest days of my childhood were spent in the hills.

In these verses the Spirit of God takes us with Mary to the hill country of Judah. She went there to visit her aging cousin Elisabeth. What a pleasurable, instructive and spiritually beneficial visit it was.

## A Beneficial Communion

“And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed *art* thou among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of thy womb” (vv. 39-42).

Here we see Mary and Elisabeth, a young virgin and an elderly mother in Israel, walking together in delightful, blessed fellowship and communion. They were cousins, but their fellowship was much more and much, much sweeter and beneficial than the companionship of family. Their fellowship with one another was the fellowship of faith. Their communion was the communion of grace.

When I talk about fellowship and communion, I am talking about the fellowship of believers, the communion of grace in Christ. We who believe “*have all things common.*” We have a common salvation, a common election, a common atonement, a common hope, a common family, a common warfare and a common inheritance. Luke tells us that these dear saints, when they visited with one another, were mutually benefited, spiritually benefited by each other. Their hearts were cheered. Their minds were uplifted. Their souls were refreshed. Their spirits were edified.

As they visited and communed with one another, discussing the grace of God, the wonders of his providence, and the excellence of his mercy, his covenant, his promises and his faithfulness, Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost; and Mary was inspired to sing a new song of praise to the Lord.

We should always regard the fellowship of God’s saints as one of our greatest privileges in this world. Sadly, J. C. Ryle rightly observed, “There are many who fear the Lord and think upon his name, and yet forget to speak often one to another.” That ought not be the case. “*As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the*

*countenance of a man his friend...As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Proverbs 27:17, 19).*

“They that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (Malachi 3:16). — What a refreshing break in our pilgrimage, what an oasis in this desert, what a resting place in this troubled world a season of fellowship with God’s saints is! Let us never take this privilege lightly. — “Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers (especially fellow strangers!): for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:1-2).

Fellowship with God’s saints is as near as we come to heaven on earth. We will be wise to seize every opportunity to enjoy the company of God’s elect in the assembly of public worship and in private company. When we have the privilege, let us take care that our company is helpful, not harmful, edifying, not a hindrance, to our brothers and sisters in Christ. We should speak to one another, as Mary and Elisabeth did, about the things of God. And in the house of God, when God’s messenger has delivered God’s message to your soul, speak to one another about the message.

Our chosen companions in this world should always be companions in the grace of God. I do not suggest that we live as hermits in this world, that we isolate ourselves from society. That would be irresponsible. I do not suggest that we treat other people contemptuously. That would be horribly wicked. Yet, believers should never choose unbelievers for their companions in any sphere of life. I am always concerned when I see anyone who professes to be a child of God choosing to spend his or her leisure time with unbelievers. Such a choice is like choosing to take fire into your bosom. It is like inviting a traitor into your camp. It is bringing a thief into your home. No good can come from it (1 Corinthians 5:6; 15:33-34; 2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

## A Believer's Confession

“And whence *is* this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy” (vv. 43-44).

Often, we think that God’s saints in days gone by were very terribly ignorant concerning the person and work of Christ. Like us, many of them were weak and ignorant of many things. They often expressed themselves poorly. They often behaved in a way that was contrary to the gospel, and contrary to their God given faith. They were, after all, men and women like us!

Yet, those men and women in days of old who knew God were also given the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). Elisabeth’s language in verse forty-three, where she called Mary “*the mother of my Lord,*” is the language of remarkable faith. It is a confession of faith every bit as remarkable as that of Peter, who confessed, “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

We must not put words in her mouth, but when she made this confession concerning the baby in Mary’s womb, Elisabeth acknowledged that the child conceived in Mary’s womb was the long expected Messiah, the son of David, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. She understood what Mary sang in verses 46-55.

“And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy *is* his name. And his mercy *is* on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of *his* mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and

to his seed for ever.”

Elisabeth’s confession was an acknowledgement of voluntary surrender to and faith in Christ as her Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3). This dear old saint had learned and gladly acknowledged what all must soon acknowledge: – Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:9-11).

## A Blessed Confidence

*“And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord”* (v. 45). — Here, we see an old, old woman, a woman who had learned the folly of both vanity and flattery, speaking in glowing terms about the blessedness of faith in Christ, the blessedness of believing God.

It is indeed a blessed thing to believe God. Faith has always been a grace by which God’s saints in this world have obtained a good report (Hebrews 11:1-16). The story of God’s saints is a story of faith, the narrative of chosen, redeemed sinners who, believing God, were and are blessed of God. By faith, they embrace God’s promises, walk with God, endure hardships, look to Christ, endure temptations, triumph over the world, the flesh and the devil, live, die and enter into glory!

There is a great volume of instruction contained in these words – *“Blessed is she that believed.”* Faith is nothing less than confidence in God. Read Elisabeth’s words again. — *“And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.”* Faith is confidence that God will accomplish all his Word, that he will perform all his promises, that he will fulfil his every decree (Philippians 1:6). This faith is the gift of God (Ephesians 1:19; 2:8; Colossians 1:12). Blessed is that sinner to whom it is given in the behalf of Christ to believe on his name (Philippians 1:29). Do we know anything about this precious gift of faith? — *“Blessed are they that have believed”* (John 20:29).

Oh, gift of gifts! Oh, grace of faith!

My God, how can it be  
That Thou, who hast discerning love,  
Shouldst give that gift to me?

Ah, Grace! into unlikeliest hearts  
It is Thy boast to come;  
The glory of Thy light to find  
In darkest spots a home.

Thy choice, (O God of goodness!) then  
I lovingly adore;  
Oh, give me grace to keep Thy grace,  
And grace to long for more!

# Chapter 9

## Mary's Song

Luke 1:46-56

“And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy *is* his name. And his mercy *is* on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of *his* mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house” (Luke 1:46-56).

After Mary heard the good news of Christ's incarnation she went to visit her older, beloved cousin Elizabeth, who was six months pregnant with John the Baptist. When the two women met together, they talked of the marvellous things God had done for them and taught them. Both were full of faith and joy. They were mutually inspirational to one another.

What a blessing good companions are! They help each other in the way. Happy are those family meetings where Christ is the theme of thought and conversation! When we meet with our families and friends, let us pray that our time together may be both pleasant and profitable. We ought to always try to be spiritually helpful to those around us, to those who come under

our influence.

## Mary's Character

Mary, the mother of our Lord, is held before us in the Book of God as a great example of God's saving grace. Being taught of God, she was a woman of remarkable faith. She believed God's revelation concerning a totally unprecedented matter, scientifically impossible, and believed it without any evidence to support her. The angel of the Lord said to her, "*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God*" (Luke 1:35). In verse 45, after the baby in Elisabeth's womb leaped for joy, because of the incarnate God in Mary's womb, Elisabeth said of Mary, "*Blessed is she that hath believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.*" Let every child of God pray that the Holy Spirit might grant us the kind of faith he gave Mary.

Mary was a woman of remarkable knowledge, too. She had a clear, firm knowledge and understanding of Holy Scripture. As we read Mary's hymn, though she was but a young woman, she had a ready grasp of the Old Testament. She quoted the Psalms, referred to God's works of old, referred to his goodness to Leah and repeated many of the words of Hannah's prayer in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 2. All who have been made the recipients of God's saving mercy should seek to become more and more fully and more and more experimentally acquainted with Holy Scripture. — "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord*" (Colossians 3:16).

Such a knowledge of Holy Scripture can never be attained without regular, daily study; but the benefits of such study will prove priceless. When she needed them most, Mary had a firm grasp of the promises of God in the Bible; and these strengthened her faith.

That which Mary knew and believed caused her to be a truly humbled soul before God. True faith and spiritual knowledge never swell the heart with pride. Rather these are the things by which the Lord breaks his own and makes them humble and contrite before him. J. C. Ryle rightly observed...

“She who was chosen of God to the high honor of being Messiah’s mother, speaks of her own ‘low estate,’ and acknowledges her need of a Savior. She does not let fall a word to show that she regarded herself as a sinless, ‘immaculate’ person. On the contrary, she uses the language of one who has been taught by the grace of God to feel her own sins, and so far from being able to save others, requires a Savior for her own soul.”

As humility is the daughter of saving faith, gratitude is the daughter of humility. All who experience God’s free favor and saving grace in Christ are filled with thanksgiving to God; and Mary certainly demonstrates such thanksgiving. That which stands out in this hymn, perhaps above everything else, is the fact that Mary considered herself a debtor to mercy alone. Therefore she sought to magnify the Lord her God, from whom all mercy and grace springs.

Her knowledge of Christ as God her Savior filled Mary with contentment. She was a poor woman. We have no evidence that she ever ceased to be afflicted with poverty. When the Savior died, he committed his poor mother to the care of one of his disciples. Yet, Mary appears to have been perfectly content. In all that is written about her in Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit never gives even a hint of dissatisfaction in her. Having Christ, she wanted no more. She says, “*My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior*” (v. 47). In verse 56 we read that “*Mary returned to her own house.*” Though she was blessed in the most extraordinary manner, she was content to go back to her modest home and become the wife of a simple carpenter. May God give us that blessed spirit of contentment, so that we can say with Paul, “*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be*

*hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Philippians 4:11-12).*

## Mary's Song

In Luke 1:46-56 God the Holy Spirit has preserved for our learning the song Mary composed and sang when she and Elizabeth met one another. It is a song of praise to God, arising from a heart of faith, humility, gratitude and love. Robert Hawker wrote...

“The song of *Mary* is full of the breathings of a soul under the influence of the Holy Ghost. How blessedly she speaks of God her Saviour; evidently showing, that she had a perfect apprehension of what the Prophets had taught, concerning the miraculous conception; and therefore knew, that the child then in her womb was, in one and the same moment, her Son and her Saviour! And how blessedly she speaks of the low estate, both in the temporal poverty of her father's house, and the spiritual reduced estate, by reason of sin, to the whole race of *Adam*. And the personal dignity to which she, a poor, young, and humble Virgin, was exalted. *He that is mighty* (said she) *hath done to me great things*. Great indeed, and, until that period, never heard of before; and never to be again wrought in the earth. And how beautifully she ends her hymn of praise, in singing the sure deliverance of the Church, by this stupendous event. *He hath holpen* (said she) *his servant Israel*: meaning, He hath redeemed the Church of God, in the Israel of God, his chosen; thus confirming the Covenant made with Abraham, that *in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed*. (Genesis 12:3. with Galatians 3:16).”

Notice, as you read this sweet song of praise, that everything spoken of in it is spoken of as though it had already been accomplished, though, as yet, Christ had not even been born. Why is that? The answer should be obvious: — That which God has purposed was finished when he purposed it (Romans 8:29-30).

*First* Mary gives praise to the Lord God, who was in her

womb, for being her Savior. — *“And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour”* (vv. 46-47). If Christ is our Savior, we have reason to sing! As she sang his praise, unlike most who pretend to sing his praise today, Mary spoke of her God with great reverence. Yet, trusting Christ, she claimed a personal interest in Christ. Thus, she magnified her Lord, by acknowledging him as her Lord and ascribing greatness to him as God her Savior. Yes, Mary called the baby in her womb, her God and her Savior. What a distinct declaration that is of our Savior’s eternal Godhead!

The word *“magnify”* here means to enlarge and make room for. Mary threw open the gates of her soul for the King of glory to come in! She rejoiced in her Lord. The word means *“danced”*. Like her great grandfather David, Mary danced before the Lord.

*Second*, Mary’s song of praise was inspired by the wondrous mystery of Christ’s incarnation. — *“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift”* (2 Corinthians 9:15). Mary sang this song because she believed the report of the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:30-35).

*“And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”*

Let sinners sing praise to God – Immanuel has come; and *“he shall save his people from their sins!”*

*Third*, Mary particularly praised God for his particular, distinguishing grace. — *“For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations*

*shall call me blessed*" (v. 48). God chose her to be the mother of our Redeemer; but she was far more greatly blessed because of her spiritual union with the Lord Jesus than in her physical union with him. She was blessed of God in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-6). Mary was blessed because Christ was formed in her by a supernatural work of grace and power by God the Holy Spirit. She is called blessed because of God's goodness to her as the object of his grace. All who are the objects of God's special love and distinguishing grace have reason to sing his praise!

*Fourth*, Mary gave praise to the Lord God because of his glorious holiness. She declared, "*Holy is his name*" (v. 49). That which caused Moses, Isaiah and Daniel to tremble caused Mary to rejoice, because she saw clearly that God in his holiness had provided a holy Sacrifice. Holiness seen through the blood shed at Calvary is the most comforting and delightful thing in the world. Let ransomed sinners sing God's praise. We have seen mercy and truth meet together. We have seen righteousness and peace kiss each other!

## Great Things

*Fifth*, Mary offered praise to the Lord for the great things he has done. — "*For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name*" (v. 49). He who is our God is great and mighty. No small things fall from his great hand. Rather, his hand makes that which appears small to be great in his use of it (Psalm 107:31, 42-43). In all the great things he does for the saving of his people, our great god displays his sovereign grace and goodness, and his almighty power, in a way that is altogether consistent with his truth, justice and holiness.

"*And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation*" (v. 50). — The exuberant lovingkindness of our God manifests itself in constant acts of mercy upon his elect, from one generation to another, to all those who reverence his name, because he "*delighteth in mercy!*"

"*He hath shewed strength with his arm*" (v. 51). — Though all that Mary mentions in this song of praise to the Triune

Jehovah may be properly applied to all God's wondrous works, keep in mind that the song is about the incarnation of our Lord Jesus. In the matter of the incarnation, she sang, "*He hath showed strength with his arm,*" the arm of his mighty power in working out the salvation of our souls. He who is mighty to save, traveling in the greatness of his strength, brought accomplished our salvation by his own arm (Isaiah 63:1-5).

"*He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts*" (v. 51). — God always resists the proud, scattering them in confusion. The proud Jews of her day presumed, as John Gill wrote, "that the Messiah would be born of one of the rich and noble families in Judea; that he would appear as a temporal prince, and set up a temporal kingdom in great state and splendor, and make them a free and flourishing people. Instead of this, he was to be born of a poor virgin...who was of Nazareth in Galilee...a virgin betrothed to a carpenter!"

"*He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree*" (v. 52). — Mighty kings and mighty angels God abases and topples from their seats. The lowly he lifts up and exalts. That is certainly true in all things relating to history and providence; but we must not fail to apply it to all things spiritual. The great things of the gospel are revealed to babes, and hidden from the wise and prudent. In the mighty saving operations of his grace, beggars were raised from the dunghill, to sit among princes, and to inherit the throne of glory. That is ever God's way (1 Corinthians 1:26-30).

"*He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away*" (v. 53). — Every needy souls, all who seek Christ and his salvation, every sinner who looks to the Son of God for forgiveness through his blood, thirsting after his righteousness he receives and fills. Those who long to know him (Philippians 3:10), who yearn for communion and fellowship with him, who pant after him in their hearts, seeking him in his Word and ordinances, shall be filled with a sense of their saving interest in him. The needy soul shall be filled with every good thing, to his soul's satisfaction. Having Christ, he can say with

Jacob, “*I have enough*” (Genesis 33:11). — The rich he always sends away empty. All who are rich in their own eyes, trusting their own righteousness, he leaves to perish.

## Help and Faithfulness

*Sixth*, Mary gives praise to the Lord God for his unflinching help. “*He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy*” (v. 54). The word “*holpen*” means to place one’s hand under the fallen, prostrate one, and lift him to his feet. That is what God did for Jacob; and that is what God does for all his elect. First, he prostrates them. Then he puts his hand under them and raises them up. Blessed be his name, he always remembers mercy to his own. — “*I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations*” (Psalm 89:1).

*Seventh*, in verse 55, Mary gives praise to the Lord her God for his covenant faithfulness. “*As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.*” He who keeps his promise to the night and to the day (Jeremiah 33:20, 25) will never break his promise to Abraham and his Seed. In Christ God has fulfilled his promises to the fathers, and particularly his promise to Abraham (Genesis 3:15; 12:1-3; 22:1-14; Galatians 3:13-14). While our God abides faithful, we have reason to sing his praise (1 Thessalonians 5:23-25).

Blessed are they who can, from the depths of their hearts, join Mary in this song of praise to our great God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, rejoicing in who he is and in all that he has done, giving thanks to him for his free distinguishing grace and his great faithfulness!

# Chapter 10

## “The Hand of the Lord was with Him”

Luke 1:57-66

“Now Elisabeth’s full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not *so*; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue *loosed*, and he spake, and praised God. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. And all they that heard *them* laid *them* up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him” (Luke 1:57-66).

The very last word spoken by God in the Old Testament was a word of promise and prophecy, a promise of mercy and a prophecy of the coming of another Elijah to prepare the way for Christ, the Messiah, our Savior.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the

coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” (Malachi 4:5-6)

Four hundred years had passed; but now Malachi’s prophecy was fulfilled. Six months prior to the birth of our Savior, John the Baptist was born by the special intervention of God.

How easily we ought to believe God! He who gave life to Elizabeth’s dead womb can do “*whatsoever seemeth him good!*” “*With God nothing shall be impossible!*” We ought to believe him implicitly and trust him confidently, without the slightest doubt, even when (especially when) all things appear to contradict his Word. The decree of God is absolute, and cannot be altered. The Word of God is inerrant and must be fulfilled. The promises of God in Christ are yea and amen and can never become nay. God almighty will do; indeed, he who is God must do all that he has said. If one word from God shall fall to the ground, the whole Book of God crumbles to nothing but a religious myth!

Notice that the birth of John the Baptist was looked upon as a singular, special act of God’s great mercy upon Elizabeth. — “*Her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her*” (v. 58). It was an act of divine mercy that caused her to conceive, an act of special mercy that carried an old woman through a full term pregnancy, an act of mercy that gave her strength to deliver, and an act of great mercy that gave birth to the child. The birth of a child is a remarkable instance of God’s great mercy; and with the mercy comes a tremendous responsibility. Happy are those homes where these things are known.

## The Blessedness of Affection

In all the circumstances surrounding John’s birth, the Lord has graciously scattered nuggets of grace for the edification of our souls. We have before us in the conduct of Elizabeth’s family and friends an example of that milk of human kindness, love,

affection and care, which ought to flow from our breasts to one another. – “*They rejoiced with her*” (v. 58).

Let all who name the name of Christ follow their example. How much more happiness there would be in this evil world, if such conduct were not so rare. Sympathy in time of sorrow costs little, but is of great value. Oil in your car’s engine may appear to be an insignificant thing; but it is vital to the engine’s movement; and expressions of care and sympathy may seem insignificant, but they are not. A kind word on a dark day is seldom forgotten. A consoling hand on heavy shoulders is a sweet succor. A thoughtful card at the appropriate time is invaluable. A word of congratulation to one who imagines he is unnoticed is a great boon. A word of appreciation, kindness, encouragement, or thoughtfulness is never out of order.

Pastors, elders, preachers, teachers, and deacons must never forget that thoughtfulness, kindness, and compassion are the very essence of ministering to the souls of men. — “*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [and] to keep himself unspotted from the world*” (James 1:27). In all the strife about words and battles over doctrine, in all the controversies raging about “great” theological issues, we must never overlook or fail to give affection and sympathy to one another (Romans 12:15; Galatians 6:1-2).

The gospel of Christ, while it sets forth the righteousness, justice and truth of God, is also a great revelation of the love of God and the kindness of our Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ saw our need and supplied it by the sacrifice of himself (John 3:14-16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:16-17; 4:9-11).

Our Savior’s name is Jehovah-jireh. He still sees our need and runs to our relief. What an example of kindness he left us. He went to the marriage feast in Cana to celebrate a wedding with some friends in John 2. He went to Bethany in John 11 to weep by the grave of a friend with his broken-hearted sisters. Words are inadequate to describe the blessedness of affection in the eyes of those who need it and receive it.

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” (Ephesians 4:32-5:2)

## The Benefit of Afflictions

As long as we are in this world, we will be children in need of instruction, protection, provision, and discipline, children under the care of our heavenly Father. In verses 59-64 we see in Zecharias’ conduct an example of a corrected child.

This old, old man was still a child of God, a child of God who required his Father’s rod, even in his old age. Because of his unbelief, Zechariah had been deaf and dumb for nine long months. But those months of affliction had not been useless. He who was so slow to believe now believed every word that proceeded from the mouth of God.

No doubt, the nine months’ of his adversity had been spent wisely by Zechariah. In all likelihood he learned more about himself and about God, more about the character of his own heart and more about the goodness, grace and glory of God in those nine months than he had learn in all his life previously. Correction had given him instruction. He was now ashamed of his unbelief.

Like Job, he could say, *“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee”* (Job 42:5). Like Hezekiah, when the Lord left him, he found out what was in his heart (2 Chronicles 32:31)

We will never escape trouble in this world of woe. Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward (Job 5:7). But in the time of trouble we ought to seek grace that we may learn by the rod of discipline. Any and every sorrow that humbles us, drives us to our knees, and brings us to our God is a great blessing of his grace and evidence of his love. Someone once said, “Sanctified

afflictions are spiritual promotions.” Trials do not change anything; but they reveal everything.

“‘Tis my happiness below  
Not to live without the cross,  
But the Savior's power to know,  
Sanctifying every loss;  
Trials must and will befall;  
But with humble faith to see  
Love inscribed upon them all,  
This is happiness to me.

God in Israel sows the seeds  
Of affliction, pain, and toil;  
These spring up and choke the weeds  
Which would else o'erspread the soil:  
Trials make the promise sweet,  
Trials give new life to prayer;  
Trials bring me to His feet,  
Lay me low, and keep me there.

Did I meet no trials here,  
No chastisement by the way,  
Might I not with reason fear  
I should prove a castaway?  
Bastards may escape the rod,  
Sunk in earthly vain delight;  
But the true-born child of God  
Must not — would not, if he might.”

*William Cowper*

## The Best of Ambitions

We all have great ambitions for ourselves; but we have especially great ambitions for our children. We want and seek so many things for them; and we make great plans for them. But when I read the last sentence of verse 66, I thought to myself, “This is the best of all ambitions, indeed, the only ambition that is

truly worth pursuing with all our hearts.” – “*And the hand of the Lord was with him!*”

This great blessing which was upon John the Baptist is the thing we ought to seek, desire, and pray for on behalf of our sons and daughters. “*The hand of the Lord was with him.*” This is “*the one thing needful,*” the one thing that will benefit their souls, the one thing that can never be lost, the one thing that will go with them beyond the grave!

“*The hand of the Lord was with him*” to protect him, to convert him, to prepare him for his work, to strengthen him in his work, to comfort him in his trials, to sustain him in his dying hours, and to carry him into Glory. What the hand of the Lord did for John the Baptist it can do for our sons and daughters as well. Let us seek it for them.

# Chapter 11

## Three Great Reasons for Praise

Luke 1:67-80

“And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel” (Luke 1:67-80).

## The Prophecy

Zacharias was not a prophet; but his song was a prophecy. It stands before us as one of the most instructive prophesies ever given. He was not a musician; but his prophecy was a song, one of the greatest hymns ever written. What qualified him to write this song and give this prophecy? Luke tells us in verse 67. — *“Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied.”*

God not only forgave the old man for his unbelief, he poured out his grace upon him in an extraordinary manner by filling him with the Holy Ghost. To be filled with the Holy Ghost is to be controlled by the Spirit. Every believer ought to seek, always, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, ruled by the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our lives (Ephesians 5:18). The Spirit filled life is not an emotional frenzy of senseless religion. The Spirit filled life is a life of wisdom, *“understanding what the will of the Lord is”* (Ephesians 5:17). It is a life of thanksgiving and praise, *“giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 5:20). And it is a life of voluntary submission, submitting my will and my life to Christ and his people, *“submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God”* (Ephesians 5:21).

But there is another sense in which a man is filled with the Holy Ghost. Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost in the sense that he was given a special unction, a special anointing to deliver the Word of God. He was divinely inspired. That is what every God called preacher wants and seeks. He wants, more than words can express, to preach to those who hear him as a man filled with the Holy Ghost, — to deliver a message directly from God to eternity bound sinners, for the praise, honor and glory of God alone! It will be your mercy to pray that God will grant that to his servant every time you go to the house of God for worship. In these last words of Luke 1 we have a message directly from God to his people, for our good and his glory.

The grace of God toward Zacharias in this passage is as instructive as it is remarkable. The Lord graciously removed the affliction he had brought upon himself by unbelief, though he had

done nothing to merit such mercy, or even to seek it. Let us never fail to remember that God's grace does not wait upon us. Grace comes before we seek it; and we can never deserve it. It flows to chosen sinners from God's free, sovereign love for us in Christ.

Because of his unbelief, the Lord had made the old priest a deaf-mute for nine months. Now, the Lord graciously took away his reproach, opened his mouth, loosed his tongue, and unstopped his ears. What will this old man say? What will he talk about? — Miracles? No. — His experiences? No. — The angelic visit? No. Zacharias spoke not as a man, but as a prophet. He spoke for God. So he passed by all those things which tickle men's ears and spoke about God, his grace, his Son, his redemption, his salvation and his praise!

The passage before us contains the very first words spoken by Zacharias after the Lord loosed his tongue. He had been a deaf mute for nine long months. But now, after the birth of his son, John the Baptist, the old servant of God speaks to God in a song of praise; and his song of praise to God was, to his newborn son and to all future generations, a song of instruction. Moreover, his song of praise and instruction was a prophecy concerning both the person and work of Christ and the ministry of John the Baptist.

“No sooner is his tongue untied, but the Lord loosens both heart and tongue to speak the Lord's praise; and to proclaim the Lord's mercy. And how doth he praise the Lord? Do not fail to observe, it is, as the God of Israel: Israel's God in covenant. All, and every part of redemption is, *to perform the mercy, promised*. Yes! For the Lord's Christ is *the mercy promised*: the first born in the womb of mercy; the whole of mercy; yea, mercy itself in the full; for there is no mercy, but in Christ. Everything which can be called mercy must have Christ in it, or it is no mercy, be it what it may. It must have its very nature from Christ; its sweetness from Christ, its value from Christ, and its everlasting continuance from Christ. And hence *Zacharias* harps upon this sweet string; that it was *to perform the mercy promised*, and to fulfil Jehovah's covenant and oath, in all the blessings of Christ, for evermore.”

(Robert Hawker).

## God our Savior

This old man, filled with the Holy Ghost, gave praise to God for three specific reasons; and every believer has great reason to give praise to God for these three things: God our Savior (v. 68), God's great salvation (vv. 69-75), and God's chosen servant (vv. 76-80).

Zacharias' first word of thanksgiving and praise is about God our Savior. — "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people*" (v. 67). Let us ever be quick with praise and thanksgiving to the great God, our Savior. "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel!*" We must never forget to thank God for his blessings; but we ought to thank and praise him first and foremost for his Being! "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel!*" The entire first chapter of Ephesians is taken up with blessing God our Savior, the great, glorious, triune God. There the Apostle Paul was inspired to write out words of praise, ascribing blessedness and glory to God the Father who planned salvation for us, to God the Son who purchased salvation for us, and to God the Holy Spirit who performs salvation in us. — "*Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake*" (Psalm 115:1). Let us ever give praise to our God because he is God. — "*Bless the Lord, O my soul. All that is within me, bless his holy name*" (Psalm 103:1).

## God's Great Salvation

After ascribing all praise, honor and glory to God, Zacharias offers thanksgiving and praise for God's great salvation. That which fills a man's mouth when he is filled with the Spirit is God's salvation (vv. 69-75).

What a description we have here of God's salvation! In verse 69 we are told that God has "*raised up an horn of salvation.*" Those words tell us four things about salvation: (1.) It is God's work. — God raised up this horn of salvation. (2.) It is an exalted salvation — "*raised up.*" (3.) It is a powerful, omnipotent

salvation. — The horn is a symbol of power. (4.) It is a bountiful salvation — “*a horn,*” a cornucopia, “*of salvation.*”

God’s salvation is for a specific people. It was never God’s intention or purpose to save all men. He did not send his Son to save all men. God’s salvation is for his elect, the house of David, the Israel of God.

In verse 70 we see that this great salvation of which we speak is a Bible salvation, spoken of by all the prophets, — “*As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began.*”

God’s salvation is a very old salvation. This was not some new thing, which Christ came to do, and John came to preach. God’s salvation was spoken of, ordained and accomplished by the triune God in eternity (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:3-6; 2 Timothy 1:9). And faithful men have spoken about God’s great salvation since the beginning of time. Adam told his sons about it. Enoch proclaimed it. Noah preached it. Job declared it. And it was spoken of by all the prophets of God. God’s prophets have always spoken about just one thing — God’s salvation. And they still do.

Salvation is the complete deliverance of our souls from all our enemies into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. — “*That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us*” (v. 71).

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? *It is* God that justifieth. Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to

separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(Romans 8:33-39)

Salvation is an act and work of God’s covenant mercy. It is the performance of “*the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham*” (vv. 72-73). Salvation is the performance of God’s mercy, God’s covenant and God’s oath (Hebrews 6:16-20).

A God wrought salvation causes sinners to become the willing servants of God forever. “*That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life*” (vv. 74-75). The Lord our God has saved us that we might serve him. Do you see that? Those who are saved by God serve God without fear, in true holiness and righteousness, the holiness and righteousness of Christ that he has made ours by his grace, walking before him in his immediate presence all the days of our lives. What a blessed privilege that is!

### **God's Chosen Servant**

Zacharias offered praise and thanksgiving to God for God himself. Then he gave thanks to God for his great salvation. In verses 76-80 Zacharias expresses praise and thanksgiving for the gift of his chosen servant.

“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.”

Faithful, gospel preachers are the gifts of Christ to his church

in this world. It is by these chosen men, specifically called and gifted for the work of the gospel, that God speaks to, ministers to, calls, converts, edifies, comforts, corrects, feeds and cares for chosen sinners in this world (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Gospel preachers do not seek, or want praise from men. Faithful men seek and crave the praise of God alone. We must never make idols out of God's servants, treating them as priests, mediators, or lords over our souls. Yet, God's servants are not to be despised and treated as useless things. Both the welfare of your own soul and the happiness and peace of God's church is greatly determined by the love and respect God's people show for and to those who preach the gospel to them (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Here, in Luke 1:76-80 we see an old, old man talking about his own son; but talking about his son not as his son, but as God's messenger to men. That Zacharias said here concerning John the Baptist is specifically a prophecy concerning that great man and his extraordinary ministry. However, it is also a declaration of every faithful gospel preacher's work in this world.

The gospel preacher is the servant of the most high God, whose business it is to prepare the way of the Lord (v. 76; Isaiah 40:3-4). Those men who are God's servants are sent with a specific message to declare, by which they prepare the way of the Lord (vv. 77-79). It is every preacher's business and responsibility, his only business and responsibility, "*To give knowledge of salvation.*" He cannot give salvation; but he must give the knowledge of it. And there is no knowledge of salvation apart from the preaching of the gospel.

The salvation we proclaim is not a general salvation hoped for, but the salvation of "*his people*" accomplished. The only way salvation can come to sinners is "*by the remission of their sins.*" The source and cause of this salvation by the remission of sins is "*the tender mercy of our God!*" The only way this salvation could ever be accomplished is by the incarnation, life, and death of Christ as our Substitute, – "*Whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us.*" It is the preacher's business "*to give light to them that sit in darkness.*" By the preaching of the

gospel, God's servants "*guide our feet into the way of peace.*"

For every chosen preacher, God has appointed "*the day of his showing to Israel*" (v. 80). If a man is chosen of God for this great and glorious work, he will not need to wave his own flag and toot his own horn. God knows where he is. At the time appointed, God will show his people who he is. — "*And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them*" (Ezekiel 33:33).

# Chapter 12

## The Birth of Our Savior

### Luke 2:1-7

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (*And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.*) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:1-7).

Here the Holy Spirit tells us about the birth of the incarnate Son of God (not the birth of the Son of God; but the birth of the incarnate Son of God), the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. Never, since the world began, was there such a birth. This was the birth of him for whom and by whom the worlds were made. Here we see God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). What we have before us in these verses is the birth of him of whom all the law and the prophets of the Old Testament spoke. The Lord Jesus Christ was born as a man at Bethlehem that he might die as a man at Calvary to redeem his people from the curse of the law. This is exactly what our Lord Jesus himself tells us in Matthew 20:28, and what the Holy Spirit tells us in Galatians 4:4-5.

## The Purpose of Our Savior's Birth

Luke does not record the purpose of Christ's birth in our text. But the Holy Spirit has recorded it for us in many places in Holy Scripture. And it would be pointless for me to write about Christ's birth, if I did not tell you why he came into this world in human flesh. We are told the purpose of our Savior's birth in the angel's message to Joseph some nine months before this. — "*And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21).

The Lord Jesus Christ was God the eternal Son before he came into this world in human flesh. The Son of God had a people in this world, called "*his people*," before he came here to save them. These people are God's elect, sinners chosen to salvation from eternity (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world on an errand of mercy, as our Substitute, Representative and Covenant Surety, to save his people from their sins. And, blessed be his name, he did what he came here to do. He saved his people, all of them, from their sins (Hebrews 10:5-14).

The Lord Jesus Christ saves his people from their sins by three mighty acts of grace, which he alone could perform: (1.) He saved all his people by blood redemption, by effectual atonement, by the satisfaction of divine justice, when he laid down his life for us at Calvary (Galatians 3:13-14; Hebrews 9:12). (2.) He saves his people, each one redeemed by his blood, by the irresistible power and grace of his Holy Spirit in regeneration (Ephesians 2:1-5). And (3.) the Lord Jesus will save his people by the resurrection of our bodies in the last day.

## The Time of Our Savior's Birth

We have in this passage a marvelous display of God's wisdom and of his sovereignty. We are specifically informed that our Savior was born into this world in those days when Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor, made a "*decree that all the world should be taxed.*"

This is an important fact in the whole scheme of things. The Lord God promised, through his servant Jacob, that Israel would not cease to be a civil state until Christ came to redeem and save his people (Genesis 49:10). Luke here tells us of the precise fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy. The Jews were under the dominion of Rome. They had lost all legal, civil power as a nation. Strangers ruled over them and demanded taxes from them. The nation of Israel was without a government of its own for the first time in their history. No sooner did Augustus tax the world than Messiah came! It was the "*due time*" and "*the fulness of time.*"

Divine providence had now arranged the best time possible for Christ to come into the world. When he had fully proved that the world by wisdom knew not God (1 Corinthians 1:21), God stepped into the world to make himself known. Religious ritualism had left men and women utterly ignorant of God and morally bankrupt. The philosophers, poets, historians, architects and rulers of all the Gentile world left the human race in spiritual darkness, moral corruption and political violence that only grew worse with time.

Yet, at this precise time required, for the first time since the tower of Babel, all the civilized world was under one government. By the time he sent his Son into the world, God had arranged the whole world in such a way as to make a path for the gospel into all the world. Let us ever find solace for our souls in this fact. — All the events of this world, all history, all governments, all times are in the hands of our great God.

"*My times are in thy hand*" (Psalm 31:15). — He always knows and always does what is best. We ought never worry and fret about the course and condition of this world, even in such dark days as these. We act like we know better than God what is best. What foolishness! I once read that Martin Luther used to frequently say to his worrying, fretting friend, Philip Malancthon, "Philip, stop trying to govern the world." We would be wise to heed those words. Let us ever live in this world as the loyal subjects of the all-wise King of kings and Lord of lords. He who is our God is God indeed, God over all! He is too wise to err, too

good to do wrong, and too strong to fail.

## The Place of Our Savior's Birth

Our Savior was not born in Nazareth of Galilee, where Mary and Joseph resided. Instead, he was born at Bethlehem. The prophet Micah had prophesied hundreds of years before it came to pass that the Lord Jesus must be born at Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); and so it came to pass.

Once more, we have before us a marvelous display of God's sovereign, absolute rule of all things in providence to accomplish the good purpose of his grace toward chosen sinners. He, who orders all things in heaven, earth, and hell, turns the hearts of kings whithersoever he will. — *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will"* (Proverbs 21:1). It was the Lord God who caused Augustus to make this decree and begin enforcing it at precisely the time when Mary's pregnancy had come to full term.

Neither Augustus nor Cyrenius had any idea what they were doing, or why. I have no doubt at all, being typical politicians, they acted only upon the unprincipled principle of expediency. What they were actually doing was carrying forth the eternal designs of our God for the salvation of his people and the glory of his own great name. Like the king of Assyria, they meant it not so, neither did their hearts think so, but they were performing the work of the Lord (Isaiah 10:5-12).

This act of the first Roman emperor was an act which laid the foundation for the kingdom of God, before which all the kingdoms of this world must soon bow and crumble. Observe this and rejoice to know that our God graciously and wisely rules and overrules all things, the good and the evil, for the accomplishment of his will. — *"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain"* (Psalms 76:10).

Our heavenly Father's providential rule of the universe ought to quieten our hearts while we sail through the troubled waters of

this world. If we believe God, we should never be greatly disturbed by the affairs of this world, or the conduct of earthly rulers. We ought to regard all things as the will of God. We should look upon every action of every political ruler as the oracle of God. It mattered not whither Shemei cursed David or praised David, God blessed him! Let us learn to regard all men and all devils, too, as creatures of God Almighty, created to serve his purpose, without the ability to think, wiggle, or move, except by the will of God (Ecclesiastes 5:8).

### The Manner of Our Savior's Birth

*“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”* — Let us never forget that it was through his own great humiliation that the Son of God obtained eternal glory for us. It was through his life of holy suffering as well as his death that he obtained eternal redemption for us (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Learn this, too, and learn it well. — God is no respecter of persons; and we must not be. We must never allow ourselves to form opinions of people's character and worth based upon their poverty or wealth, their face or place, or their race or rank. May God the Holy Spirit give us grace to follow our Savior's example in dealing with one another (Philippians 2:1-11). O Holy Spirit, give us the mind of Christ!

# Chapter 13

## The Message of the Incarnation

### Luke 2:8-20

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them” (Luke 2:8-20).

The incarnation and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is an

undeniable fact of history. Let carping scoffers say and do what they will, it is a fact that cannot be denied. Yet, it is a fact the meaning of which very, very few understand. The meaning of the incarnation can be understood only by those who are taught of God. All spiritual knowledge comes by divine revelation. Those who are taught of God are well taught. But until a person is taught of God, he cannot know, discern, or understand anything spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:12-14). With that fact in mind, let us ever pray, as we open the Book of God, that God the Holy Spirit will teach us the wondrous things revealed in the Book.

## The Men Chosen

*First*, in verse 8 we see the men chosen by God to whom the glad tidings of Christ's birth first came and by whom the message of his birth was first proclaimed. — "*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*" The first announcement of Christ's birth did not come to the princes, priests and educated men at Jerusalem. God passed by the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, and made himself and his word known to a few weak, uneducated, insignificant, poor, despised shepherds.

Here we see something of God's method of grace. God is no respecter of persons. It is his common method of operation to pass by the high and mighty, and choose the poor and lowly. He normally passes by the wise and prudent, leaving them in the confusion of their imaginary brilliance, and reveals his grace and glory in Christ unto babes.

This is God's common method of operation in all things. He chooses the most unlikely vessels to be vessels of mercy, and the most unlikely instruments to be the tools with which he performs his wondrous works in this world. Poverty is no barrier against grace. Lack of education, or even natural ability, is no barrier against usefulness. God has mercy on whom he will; and he uses whom he will (James 2:5; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

These men were shepherds, hardworking, laboring men, and worshippers of God. Honest labor is no barrier to divine worship.

Really, there should be no need for that statement; but there are some who seem to think that piety is sitting at home, reading their Bibles, studying theology and letting other people assume their responsibilities. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our Lord teaches us plainly that men and women who neglect their families and responsibilities in the name of worshipping and serving God are liars and hypocrites who have denied the faith.

He who worships God best does so as he serves him in this world. Honest labor is no barrier to holiness. Diligent work is no hindrance to divine instruction. Moses was keeping sheep when God appeared to him in the bush, and called him to be a prophet. Gideon was threshing wheat when the Lord called him to deliver Israel. And Elisha was plowing the field when the Lord God made him a prophet. In fact, I cannot find any place in the Book of God where any man ever volunteered to be a prophet, except a false prophet.

## The Angelic Messengers

In verses 9-14 Luke tells that the angel of the Lord was sent of God to announce our Savior's birth. Then, suddenly, a great multitude of angels appeared, praising God. The language used by the Spirit of God in this passage seems to suggest that all the hosts of heaven, all the angels of God, suddenly flew like a bolt of lightening to join in the praise of the incarnate God. It is written, "*When he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him*" (Hebrews 1:6).

The first worshippers of the incarnate God were not the sinners he had come to save, but the angels of God who had never sinned. No doubt, there is much more here than I am able to grasp; but when I think of the entire hosts of heaven rushing to the earth to worship our Savior, as he came into the world, two things are obvious: (1.) What great interest the angels of God have in the person and work of Christ! And (2.) how greatly the angels of heaven must love God's elect!

- They protect God's chosen, preserving the elect

unto salvation (Hebrews 1:14)

- They rejoice in the conversion of redeemed sinners (Luke 15:10)
- The angels meet with the assemblies of God's saints, that they might learn from us the wonders of redemption (Ephesians 3:10)
- And they shall be gathered with us in the general assembly of elect men and elect angels in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-24)

## The Message

*Third*, I want us to see and understand the message of the incarnation set before us in verses 10-14. In verse 10 we read, “*And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*” The message of the incarnation is a message of “*good tidings.*” The gospel of the grace of God is not good advice. It is good news, “*good tidings.*” The coming of Christ to save his people reveals the good will and amazing love of God to his elect. The good tidings of grace declare that all the law and prophets are fulfilled in Christ. These are “*good tidings of great joy,*” of joy unspeakable and full of glory, the everlasting joy and peace of God's salvation.

The good tidings of grace proclaimed in the gospel are “*to all the people.*” The words, “*which shall be to all the people,*” do not suggest that the gospel brings joy to all without exception. The gospel does not bring joy to all men. It brought no joy to Herod, the Scribes, the Pharisees, or the Sadducees. To some it brings greater condemnation. To the reprobate and unbelieving, it is a savor of death unto death. But it does bring this great joy to all nations, to all God's elect, scattered among the nations, and to all needy sinners everywhere.

The message of the incarnation is the proclamation of the sovereign Lord who has come to save his people from their sins. — “*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord*” (v. 11). The “*you*” unto whom Christ

was born, whom he came to save, is God's elect, his people, the seed of Abraham (Isaiah 9:6; Hebrews 2:14-16). This One of whom the angel spoke is "*a Savior.*" A Savior is one who saves, not one who merely tries to save, or merely offers salvation. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior!

He is the Christ, God's anointed. The man who is our Savior, anointed of God, is himself the Lord. He is the Lord our God, the Lord our Righteousness, and the Lord of all. He is the Lord and the Savior of whom Isaiah spoke. Luke, writing by divine inspiration in verse 12, tells us pointedly that the virgin and her child, of whom Isaiah spoke (Isaiah 7:14), is Mary and the Lord Jesus, her virgin born child. — "*And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*"

The message of the incarnation, the message of the gospel is the revelation and declaration of the glory of God in Christ. — "*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men*" (vv. 13-14). The psalmist declared that his glory would be great in God's salvation (Psalm 21:5); and it is! The gospel is called "*the gospel of the glory of God.*" We see the wisdom and power of God in creation. We see the justice and truth of God in the law. We know something about the holiness and righteousness of God by nature. But the glory of God is nowhere seen as it is revealed in the coming, obedience and death of the Lord Jesus Christ as the sinner's Substitute.

Only in Christ crucified do we see how God can be both a just God and a Savior (Isaiah 45:20; Romans 3:24-26). Only at Calvary do we see all the infinite perfections of God's glorious, holy Being in complete and perfect harmony. We see his wisdom and prudence in the scheme of redemption. His mercy, love and grace are made manifest in giving his Son to be our sin-atonement sacrifice. We behold his justice and truth in the execution of our blessed Redeemer, when he was made sin for us. And we see and know his immutable faithfulness in forgiving sin for Christ's sake. The Lord God has saved us for his name's sake (Psalm

106:8; Ephesians 1:3-14); and he shall show forth the greatness of his glory in us in the last day (Ephesians 2:7).

The gospel, the message of the incarnation, is the proclamation on earth of peace — “*on earth peace.*” The gospel nowhere promises political peace, civil peace, domestic peace, or carnal peace of any kind. Just the opposite. Our Lord said, “*I came not to send peace, but a sword.*” The peace which has come to the earth is Christ himself, who is our Peace (Ephesians 2:14). Jesus Christ our Lord, our Daysman, our Mediator, our Substitute has made peace between the holy Lord God and fallen, guilty sinners, by the blood of his cross. He has made a legal and a lasting peace for us; and Christ, who is our peace, gives us peace, “*peace which passeth all understanding*” (Philippians 4:7). He gives us the peace of his pardon, the peace of his providence and the peace of his presence. And our blessed savior establishes and maintains peace between men (Colossians 3:10-11).

The message of the incarnation is God’s “*good will towards man.*” The Holy Spirit does not leave us to guess what that good will of God toward man is. This is not a book in which we must fill in the blanks. God the Holy Spirit tells us exactly what the good will of God is. God’s good will is the salvation of his elect by Christ Jesus, for the everlasting praise and glory of his own great name (John 6:37-40; Ephesians 1:3-12).

## Obedient Faith

We must not overlook the obedience of faith exemplified in these shepherds in verses 15-19.

“And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them

by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart.”

They had God’s Word. Their duty was plain. No doubt, the messengers were unusual. The message of God was given in an unusual way. Yet, without a moment’s hesitation, without the least hint of doubt or question, they did exactly what God told them to do.

When our path of duty is clear, when we know what the will of the Lord is, when we know what he would have us to do, we must not confer with flesh and blood. Obedience is always right.

These shepherds did not stop and say to themselves or one another, “Who will take care of our sheep? Someone must keep them from the wolves.” They left their sheep in the care of him who told them to go to Bethlehem. Let us do the same.

God has called me to preach the gospel. That is my responsibility. I am his servant. If I would serve him faithfully, I must leave the care of my family in his hands. Anything less on my part would be disobedience. In fact, the Lord God has specifically promised that none shall ever suffer loss by obeying him (Exodus 34:23-24).

As with these shepherds, our journey’s end will be glorious. Our pilgrimage through this world, begun in faith, will end in praise. — “*And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them*” (v. 20). So it shall be with us (Revelation 19:1-6).

# Chapter 14

## “According to the Law”

### Luke 2:21-24

“And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present *him* to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons” (Luke 2:21-24).

Everything our Savior did as a man he did “*according to the law.*” When the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save his people from their sins, he willingly put himself under the law and became voluntarily subject to the law in all things as a man. He did so because God cannot justify the guilty except upon the grounds of strict justice. Righteousness must be maintained and justice must be satisfied in the exercise of mercy, love and grace. He who is our God and Savior is “*a just God and a Savior*” (Isaiah 45:20). — “*By mercy and truth iniquity is purged*” (Proverbs 16:6). Our blessed Savior magnified the law and made it honorable as our Substitute, “*that we might receive the adoption of sons*” in the sweet experience of his saving grace (Isaiah 42:21; Galatians 4:4-5).

Though the yoke of the law was a heavy yoke, and only a shadow of good things to come, if we would have those good

things, Christ must bear the law's heavy yoke for us. And he did it as our willing Substitute and Surety. Though the carnal ordinances of the law were what the Holy Spirit calls "*weak and beggarly elements*" (Galatians 4:9), and but the "*rudiments of the world*" (Colossians 2:8, 20), our Lord Jesus Christ submitted to all the ordinances and institutions of the law as a man, that he might fulfil the law for us and bring it to an honorable end. He fulfilled all the law for us, from the beginning to the end of his manhood, that he might by his obedience unto death bring in everlasting righteousness for us and put away our sins forever, and that he might do so in a way that honors God.

Here in Luke 2:21-24 the Spirit of God shows us how the Lord Jesus, as our Savior, Mediator, Surety and Substitute, from the very beginning of his holy manhood, fulfilled the law of God in the room and stead of his people.

### Circumcised Surety

When he was just a baby, eight days old, the Lord Jesus Christ was circumcised as our covenant Surety. Circumcision was instituted under the law as a symbol of the new birth. The cutting away the filth of the flesh showed the necessity of God's elect being purified by his grace (Titus 3:5-6). But Christ had no sin. Why was he circumcised? The answer is obvious. He was circumcised as our Surety.

Circumcision identified him as one with Abraham's seed whom he came to save (Hebrews 2:16-17). Circumcision required the shedding of blood. Here he shed a few drops of blood, by a painful act done to him, by order of God's law, as a foreshadowing of the pouring out of his life's blood unto death, by the order of God's law, in the most painful, ignominious manner possible. By submitting to this ordinance of the law, our blessed Savior voluntarily made himself a debtor to do the whole law for us (Galatians 5:3).

Circumcision was the legally required pledge of every Israelite, that he was a debtor to keep the whole law. Our Lord Jesus Christ, "by being circumcised," wrote Thomas Goodwin,

“did as it were set his hand to it, being made sin for us.” The ceremonial law consisted much in sacrifices. Christ hereby obliged himself to offer, not the blood of bulls and goats, but his own blood as our Substitute.

It is a blessed thing to see the Christ of God standing before the law in our place, at the very beginning of his humanity, as he entered this world to redeem and save his people, making himself a debtor to the law, that we might never be debtors to the law (Romans 6:14-15; 7:4; 8:1-4; 10:4).

## Named Savior

When he was circumcised, the incarnate God was named as our Savior. – *“His name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”* This name, “JESUS,” or Joshua, was given to our Lord by the express command of God by the angel, both to Joseph and to Mary, before he was conceived in the womb (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31).

“Jesus” was a common name in ancient times (Colossians 4:11); and many are called “Jesus” who are not saviors at all. Our Lord was given this name because it was the name of two very eminent types of him in the Old Testament: Joshua who led Israel into the land of promised rest, and Joshua the priest upon his throne, who represented the removal of sin by Christ (Zechariah 3:1-5), and also represented our Lord Jesus Christ upon his throne as our Intercessor King (Zechariah 6:11-13). Our Lord Jesus Christ was named Jesus because he was sent into this world to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21); and save them he shall. — *“His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed”* (Psalms 72:17).

“How sweet the name of Jesus sounds  
In a believer’s ear!  
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,  
And drives away his fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole,  
And calms the troubled breast,  
Tis manna to the hungry soul,  
And to the weary, rest.

Dear name! The rock on which I build,  
My shield and hiding place:  
My never failing treasury filled,  
With boundless stores of grace!"

## The Firstborn

Our Lord Jesus Christ was presented in the temple at Jerusalem as the Firstborn, "*according to the law.*"

"And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present *him* to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord)." (Luke 2:22-23)

Mary came to the temple to offer her sacrifices for ceremonial purification forty days after the Lord Jesus was born, "*according to the law*" (Leviticus 12:4-6). Certainly, we have before us a reminder of the fact that there is no cleansing from uncleanness of any kind, except by the blood of a sacrifice. If we would be clean before God, it must be by blood.

The Lord Jesus came into his temple to fulfil the prophecy given by Malachi (Malachi 3:1). And our Savior, the God-man, came into the temple, according to the law of God, as the firstborn, as God's firstborn, that one who is sanctified and holy before God (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 3:13).

Christ is the Firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29), the Firstborn of every creature (Colossians 1:15), and the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18). Throughout the Old Testament, the preeminence of our Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior was typified as the first, firstborn, firstfruits and the firstlings of the flock and of the herd. Indeed, everything

recorded in the Old Testament foreshadows him who is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, and the Sum and the Substance of all things in the salvation of his people (Luke 24:25-27, 44). There is nothing in the Book of God that does not speak of our all-glorious Christ, nothing that does not, in one way or another, set forth his supremacy, excellence and glory as God our Savior. Nowhere is this fact more evident than in those passages dealing with the firstborn.

The firstborn symbolized a father's might and strength, "*the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power*" (Genesis 49:3). In that awesome night, when the Lord God slew the firstborn of both man and beast among the Egyptians (Exodus 12:29), he claimed the firstborn of both man and beast in Israel as his own, requiring that they be sanctified unto him (Exodus 13:2).

It was God himself, and God alone, who put a difference between the firstborn in Egypt and the firstborn in Israel on that night. We are expressly taught by the Spirit of God that everything on that passover night was typical of Christ, who as "*our Passover was sacrificed for us*" (1 Corinthians 5:7). The sprinkling of the blood of the lamb of the first year, without blemish, and without spot, on the houses of the Israelites, was the one thing that put a difference between the firstborn of Israel and the firstborn of Egypt. The blood of the lamb alone saved them from destruction. This we are plainly told in Exodus 11:7.

As it was on that great night of judgment and mercy, so the year of Christ's redeemed is both the day of vengeance and the day of salvation (Isaiah 63:3-5). When the Son of God died as our Substitute upon the cursed tree, he both bore all the vengeance of God's holy wrath for us, to the full satisfaction of divine justice; and obtained eternal redemption and salvation for us (Hebrews 9:12). At the same time, he declares, "*the day of vengeance is in my heart.*" Yes, there is a day appointed and fixed by him, when our God will execute judgment in the firstlings of his enemies, as well as of mercy in the firstlings of his people.

The birthright of the firstborn among the children of Israel gave him preeminence in the family. To him belonged the right

of priesthood (Numbers 3:12-13; 40-45; 8:15-18). The firstborn was given a double portion among his brethren (Deuteronomy 21:17). And to the firstborn it was promised, "*thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee*" (Genesis 49:8). All these Old Testament declarations were intended to show forth the majesty of Christ as "*the firstborn among many brethren.*" All the offering required of God for every male that opened the womb pointed to our Lord Jesus (Exodus 13:2; 34:19-20; Leviticus 12:6; Luke 2:21-24).

Robert Hawker suggested that the Scriptures, when speaking of "*the firstborn that openeth the womb,*" must have been prophetic of the virgin birth of our Savior. He wrote, "For strictly and properly speaking, none but the Lord Jesus ever did open the womb...In every other instance, from the creation of the world, as anatomists well know, it is accomplished at the time of conception." Our blessed Savior, "*the firstborn,*" was conceived in Mary's virgin womb by the overshadowing power of God the Holy Spirit. He opened Mary's virgin womb when he came forth from it to accomplish our redemption. Thus, throughout the Levitical dispensation, the firstborn of man and beast directed the eye of faith to him whom the triune God appointed to have everlasting preeminence as "*the firstborn.*" In all things it is, was and forever shall be the will of the eternal God, that Christ have preeminence in all things as the God-man, our Mediator and Redeemer.

## Poorest of Men

Though he is God the Son, when he came into this world to redeem and save his elect, our blessed Lord Jesus, the Firstborn, became the poorest of men, that he might bring us into the unsearchable riches of his grace and his kingdom. We see this in Mary's sacrifice (v. 24). The law required worshippers to bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering, except if they were very poor. If they were very poor, they were allowed to bring two young

pigeons or two turtledoves (Leviticus 12:6-8), the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. Mary was a poor woman.

Mary offered “*A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.*” — “*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich*” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

# Chapter 15

## Christ Our Light, Our Glory and Our Salvation

### Luke 2:25-35

“And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name *was* Simeon; and the same man *was* just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this *child* is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:25-35).

Here is an accurate description of every saved sinner. — “And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him” (v. 25). This is the only place in the Bible where Simeon’s name is

mentioned. We know nothing about him, except what is revealed in these eleven verses. But this man is set before us in words which identify his character as one who had been saved by the free and sovereign grace of God. He was a just man, upright and honest in his dealings with men. He was devout, devoted to the worship, service, will and glory of God. He was waiting for the Christ, the consolation of Israel. “*And the Holy Ghost was upon him.*” All believers are people who live in and walk in the Spirit.

Here is a revealed fact. — “*And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ*” (v. 26). Without question, this refers to the fact that the Lord God had specifically and supernaturally revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen Christ with his own eyes. Here is a revealed fact. – Not one of God’s elect shall die until they have seen Christ with the eye of faith (2 Peter 3:9).

Here is a blessed Guide. — “*And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law*” (v. 27). When we come to the house of God, by the Spirit of God, we are sure to meet the Son of God there!

Here is a glorious Salvation. — “*Then took he him up in his arms (by personal faith), and blessed (praised) God, and said, (in confident hope) Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him*” (vv. 28-33).

Here is a Savior and a gospel despised by all men in every age, except those to whom he is revealed. — “*And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*”(vv. 34-35).

These verses of inspiration reveal four simple, but blessed,

spiritual truths, gospel truths, which we ought to lay to heart.

### **1. God never leaves himself without a witness.**

In the worst of places, in the darkest of times, the Lord God still has his seven thousand who have not and will not bow the knee to Baal. Most in every age wear the mark of the beast; but God's elect will not and cannot, because their names were written in the Lamb's book of life, by the pen of immutable grace, before the world began (Revelation 13:8).

The Church of God may be small in the midst of Babylon the great whore; but the gates of hell shall never prevail against it. God's little flock may be driven into the wilderness; but the Good Shepherd still carries his Lambs in his bosom and feeds them by his grace. The woman is persecuted by the dragon of hell; but God providentially causes all the world to be her helper (Revelation 12). God never leaves himself without a witness. He always has a Lot in Sodom, an Obadiah in Ahab's household, a Daniel in Babylon, a Jeremiah in Zedekiah's court, a Simeon in Jerusalem and an elect remnant in an apostate age.

### **2. Those who have seen Christ have no reason to fear death.**

Yes, it is possible to die without fear. The Lord Jesus Christ came here to deliver his own from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). Many die in frustrated resignation, with a helpless, baseless hope of peace and release from misery. There appear to be "*no bands in their death.*" There are very few who die in confident peace; but every believer ought to die in peace (Roman 8:31-39; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Exodus 15:16-19). There is no deliverance from the fear of death except by looking to him whose death is the death of death; but those who trust Christ have no reason to be afraid of death. Our Lord Jesus has done many things to deliver us from this fear of death and the bondage that accompanies it.

He has destroyed the power of death by dying in our place and rising again. Since all of God's elect were partakers of flesh and blood, under the dominion of death, Christ became a man to suffer and die for us. It was not possible for our Representative to satisfy the claims of Divine justice against us unless he lived and died in our nature. By his substitutionary death on the cursed tree and his triumphant resurrection, the Son of God destroyed the power of Satan and the power of the grave over us. We are now more than conquerors in him. Why then should we fear death?

The Lord Jesus delivers us from the fear of death by removing our sin. — *"The sting of death is sin."* It is sin which causes men torment in death; but in Christ we have no sin. In him we are fully forgiven. By his blood our sins are washed away. If we are born of God, we are in Christ; *"and in him is no sin"* (1 John 3:1-5). Be sure you have the forgiveness of sin by faith in Christ, and fear death no more. To die forgiven, *"accepted in the Beloved,"* is not really to die at all. It is simply the departure out of this world into the Father's house.

The law of God held us in bondage to the sentence of death and condemnation; but *"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law"* (Galatians 3:13). *"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth"* (Romans 10:4). He is the end of the law's power to condemn. In the book of God's holy law there is no legal claim of condemnation upon any believer. Christ satisfied that claim for us. Why then should we fear? If I am in Christ, I am dead to the law (Romans 7:4; 8:1-4).

The Lord Jesus Christ delivers us from the fear of death by changing the character of death. For the unbeliever, death is a horrible thing. For the unbeliever, anything short of death is mercy. But, for the believer, death is a great blessing. John Trapp wrote...

*"To those that are in Christ death is but the day-break of eternal brightness; not the punishment of sin, but the period of sin. It is but a sturdy porter opening the door of eternity, a rough passage to eternal pleasure."*

Why should Israel be afraid to cross the swelling Jordan into

the land of promise with the ark of God before them? The fact is believers do not die in the sense that others do. Our Lord said, “*Whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die.*” To the ungodly, death is the penalty of sin; but to the believer, it is just a change of location. Death to the wicked is the execution of justice, but to the believer, it is a deliverance from sin. To the worldling, death is the beginning of sorrows, but to the believer, it is admission into glory. To the rebel, death is imprisonment, but to the believer, it is freedom.

### **3. Wherever true faith is found, there is gospel knowledge and spiritual understanding.**

This man, Simeon, had a clear knowledge of the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is important. Blessed are those who are thus taught of God (Isaiah 54:11-14; John 6:45). Faith in Christ is not a leap in the dark. It is confidence based upon the revelation of God. It is the result of being taught of God. It is obvious Simeon knew that God has an elect people in every race, Jew and Gentile, who are the true Israel of God. He understood that all men and women by nature are engulfed in great spiritual darkness. But he also knew that the Lord Jesus Christ, the very baby he held in his arms, is the Light of the world and the glory of God, the glory of the Triune God, the revelation of the glory of God and the glory of his people (Jeremiah 9:23-24; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31). Simeon knew that the Lord Jesus Christ is himself God’s salvation. Salvation is not a system of doctrine, a religious creed, or a reformation of life. Salvation is a Person; and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **4. Certain things always follow Christ and his gospel.**

We are told in verses 34 and 35 that many will fall by him and many will be resurrected by him. To some, he is a stumbling stone and a rock of offense. To others, he is the sure Foundation, upon which we are built. “*Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious.*” And this is according to the will, purpose and design

of God (Isaiah 8:14; Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:8; Jude 4). Yet, pain and persecution will be the lot of all who trust him and follow him. And this, too, is by the will of our God and heavenly Father (Philippians 1:29).

# Chapter 16

## To Them that Look for Redemption

Luke 2:36-40

“And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him” (Luke 2:36-40).

At the very moment Simeon held Christ in his arms and called him God’s Salvation, Anna came into the temple, observed the things spoken by Simeon, worshipped the child Christ Jesus as her Savior, and testified of him as such “*to them that looked for redemption.*” Are you, like those in Jerusalem to whom Anna spoke, looking for redemption? I pray that the Lord God has caused your eyes to fall upon this page, because he has caused you to be looking for redemption, deliverance and salvation. If you are looking for redemption, look to Christ, look away to Christ. He alone is the Redeemer of sinners, in whom alone we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

In these verses we read about a godly woman, whose name is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible. Anna, like Simeon, is one of those people mentioned only by Luke. In verses 25-35 Luke tells us about a godly old man who worshipped and testified of the Lord Jesus Christ in his earliest infancy. Here, he tells us of the worship and testimony given by an old woman as she beheld the Lord's Christ.

## Anna the Prophetess

The name "*Anna*" here is the same as "*Hannah*," the mother of Samuel in the Old Testament. The name means "grace," or "gracious." Anna was the kind of woman her name signifies. She was a gracious woman. She had experienced the grace of God. She was saved by grace, walked in grace and told others about that grace.

This woman was "*a prophetess*." Though prophecy had ceased among the Jews for four hundred years, it now revived as a signal of Christ's, the Messiah, coming into the world.

In this day of utter disregard for God's Word, in which women are being ordained and sent out by almost all religious denominations as deacons, preachers, missionaries, evangelists, pastors and theologians, I must say something about the fact that Anna was a prophetess. Were it not for the universal confusion in the religious world about female preachers, I would pass over these words with little comment. But the fact that such confusion prevails compels me to speak.

There are a few instances of female prophets, prophetesses, in the Scriptures, both before and after the coming of Christ: — Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, — Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth, — Huldah, the wife of Shallum; — and this woman, Anna, at the time of Christ's birth. Later, in the Book of Acts, we read about four daughters of Philip the Evangelist, who were prophetesses.

Does this mean that it is proper for God's church to ordain women as deacons, missionaries, preachers, evangelists and

pastors today? No! The Word of God absolutely and clearly forbids such nonsense. The teachings of Holy Scripture in this regard are so plain that error here is without excuse (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12). These are offices which, by God's order, are for men only. This is not a matter of sexism, male chauvinism, or anything of the kind. It is a matter of reverence for God and obedience to his Word.

In all things godly women are modest, gladly living in subjection to their husbands. Believing women are not rebels to God, his order or his Word. Just as men are to be in subjection to Christ and to all who are put in authority over them, just as deacons, elders and churches are to be in subjection to their pastors, just as children are to be in subjection to their parents, women are to be in subjection to their husbands. In the house of God, women serve in subjection to men. They are never to be placed in a position of dominance over men.

What about these who are called "prophetesses" in the Scriptures? Do we just ignore them? No. But we do not build our doctrine on obscure statements. We build our doctrine on the plain instructions of Holy Scripture, given in the place or places where the subject under consideration is taught. The fact that there were prophetesses in the Old Testament and through the Acts of the Apostles does not nullify the prohibitions given in the Epistles to female preachers. However, when the Word of God speaks of female prophets, and of women prophesying, that does not imply that they were preachers.

The word "prophetess" may simply refer to a woman who is a worshipper of God, as appears to be the case where it first appears (Exodus 15:20), referring to Aaron's sister, Miriam. It is also used to describe the wife of a prophet (Isaiah 8:3). So it does not necessarily refer to a female who stood forth in public to preach. The word "prophesy" does not necessarily mean, "instruct," "foretell" or "preach" in a public way. The word is used commonly to speak simply of worship, praise and witnessing (1 Corinthians 11:5, and throughout chapters 14 and 15).

A prophetess was a woman who worshipped God, praised

him and bore witness to him. As stated regarding Miriam, the word “*prophetess*” was used in ancient times much like we use the word “worshipper” today. We might say of such and such women, “they worship God.” That would be the same thing as saying, “they prophesy.”

The only female preacher ever spoken of in a church in the New Testament was that wicked woman at Thyatira, who called herself a prophetess, but whom our Lord calls “*Jezebel*” (Revelation 2:20). When God sets women up as rulers over men, it is an act of judgment, not an act of grace (Isaiah 3:12).

## Character and Conduct

This woman, Anna, was “*the daughter of Phanuel.*” Her father’s name is the same as that which Jacob gave to the place where he saw God face to face (Genesis 32:30-31). “*Phanuel*” means “the face of God.” How appropriate! Anna, Phanuel’s daughter, saw the face of God in Jesus Christ!

Next, Luke tells us that Anna was “*of the tribe of Asher.*” Asher was one of the ten tribes carried away into captivity. Yet, even in Asher, there was a remnant according to the election of grace. God has his elect everywhere. He preserves his elect, even when he judges their nation. And at the appointed time, he calls them by his grace, and brings them out of bondage, darkness, condemnation and death into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

“*She was of great age.*” — Anna was an old, old woman. She had lived in widowhood for 84 years! That means, if she had gotten married, as Jewish girls of the time often did, at the age of twelve, and lived with her husband for seven years before he died, she was at least 103 years old. Yet, she was constantly in the house of God, worshipping him, and doing what she could in the service of his kingdom and glory.

The things which Anna did and the things she spoke are here recorded by divine inspiration to teach us, encourage us, and strengthen us in the faith of Christ. And the first thing set before

us in verses 35-37 is a picture of the believer's character and conduct. Anna was a woman of irreproachable character. She was what the Holy Spirit describes as "*a widow indeed*" (1 Timothy 4:5). This old woman is held before us as an example of true godliness.

“And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day.”

She was not a godly woman by nature, but a sinner. She did not make herself godly by austere discipline. She was converted and made godly by the grace of God that was upon her. — Grace experienced makes the ungodly godly (2 Corinthians 5:17; Titus 2:11-12; Ephesians 2:8-10). Anna's character and conduct are described in simple, but powerful words. She "*served God with fastings and prayers night and day.*"

Many, who do not know the gospel, who have never experienced the saving grace of God in Christ and the transforming power of that grace, look upon these things as remarkable, exceptional qualities in a believer. They consider them ideal, but not essential to the believer's character. Nothing could be further from the truth. The character described in these two verses, the character of this old saint is not the target at which we must shoot, but the genuine character of all true believers. This is the character of those who are born of God, of those who walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25). — "*Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit*" (Romans 8:9).

Anna was also a woman of moral chastity. She was a virgin when she married. Her husband died after only seven years. And she remained chaste throughout her years, chaste and virtuous in an age of horrible profligacy and immorality.

This old woman was, throughout her years, faithful in the worship of God. — She "*departed not from the temple.*" Obviously, that does not mean that she never left the temple. She

could not have come in at that moment, if she had not been outside. This is simply a declaration that she did not, as so many do, forsake the assembly of God's saints (Hebrews 10:25). When the doors of the temple were open, Anna made it her business to be there.

You will notice that Anna's commitment to the worship of God publicly is placed before her private devotion. Why? Because, when public worship is despised, there is no private worship. To depart from the assembly of God's saints, to depart from the worship of God is to forsake the Lord altogether. The first step to apostasy is the neglect of public worship (Hebrews 10:23-29).

Anna was a woman who loved the house of God. She looked upon it as that place where God promised to meet with, reveal himself and speak to his people. Therefore, she "*departed not from the temple.*" She was devoted and consecrated to her God. — "*She served God with fastings and prayers night and day.*"

The Jews had reduced fasting and prayer to empty religious rituals, rituals by which they endeavored to show their piety and devotion to one another. They considered the outward husk to be the meat. So they threw the grain away and kept the husk. That is exactly the way it is with most religious people. Their religion is all outward. It is all show. They substitute the saying of prayers with praying. They replace devotion of heart with regular fastings.

Most people think of prayer as the means by which we get God to do what he otherwise would not do. They imagine that if prayer does not work, and we really want to get God's attention and put the squeeze on him, fasting will do the job. That is not the case.

Fasting and prayer always go together. The two are never separated. In the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew's Gospel our Lord Jesus tells us plainly that we are not to make an outward show of them before men. Though fasting may involve an abstinence from food for a period of time, and prayer is, in public worship and in family worship, very properly audible, primarily, fasting and

prayer are matters of the heart.

Fasting is a synonym for voluntary, deliberate self-denial, consecration, and devotion (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Prayer is the believer's communion with, faith in, worship of and submission to the will and glory of God as we walk before him in this world.

## Looking for Redemption

*“And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem”* (v. 38). — Anna loved Christ, her God and Savior. When she heard Simeon's prophecy, she also gave thanks to God for his Son, her Savior. *“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!”* She *“spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Israel.”* She loved him whom she trusted, because she had been made to experience his love for her. It is written, *“We love him, because he first loved us”* (1 John 4:19)

Believers in every age are a people who look for redemption, who look for Christ. God's people, from the days of Adam and Eve, through all the days and years of Old Testament history, in the days of Simeon and Anna, in the days of the apostles and in this day, are a people looking for the redemption of Israel, the redemption of God's true Jerusalem, his true Israel. Believers are a people looking for and waiting for Christ the Redeemer, that One who is our Redemption (1 Thessalonians 1:10; Titus 2:14; Romans 13:11). Our *“redemption draweth nigh!”*

Christ is our Redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). We look to him alone and look to him always for redemption. The Lord God always has a people in this world, even as he did in Anna's day and in that wicked city, who look for the redemption of Israel, who believe and confidently hope, in the teeth of all that they see, that Christ will redeem, that he will completely deliver all his people from all the consequences of sin, by his sovereign power and effectual grace.

## Christ's Humanity

*“And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him”* (vv. 39-40). — What a declaration these words are of the glorious humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ!

*“The child grew”* in body, and in physical strength and stature. — *“And waxed strong in spirit.”* As a man with a real human soul as well as a real human body, the Lord Jesus grew strong in his soul. He grew into a man of strong constitution, strong character, strong will and strong affection.

*“Filled with wisdom”* – He was filled with wisdom as our Surety in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. But these words describe the natural wisdom and the spiritual wisdom into which our Savior grew as a man.

*“And the grace of God was upon him.”* — The love and favor of God was upon him as his beloved Son, in whom he is well-pleased. The gifts and graces of God’s Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, was upon him. J. C. Ryle wrote...

“Our Lord partook of everything that belongs to man’s nature, sin only excepted. As a man he was born an infant. As a man he grew from infancy to boyhood. As a man he yearly increased in bodily strength and mental power, during his passage from boyhood to full age. Of all the sinless conditions of man’s body, its first feebleness, its after growth, its regular progress to maturity, he was in the fullest sense partaker. We must rest satisfied with knowing this. To pry beyond is useless.”

Why did the Lord of glory stoop so low? Why did he condescend to such utter servitude? The answer is found in John 3: 16-17. — *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life or God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be*

*saved.”*

# Chapter 17

## Lessons from the Master's Boyhood

Luke 2:41-52

“Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not *of it*. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among *their* kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:41-52).

What was life like for our Savior, as he grew up in the home of

Joseph and Mary? What occupied his time? How did he and his family live day by day? Those might be interesting questions; but they are questions for which no answers are given in the Word of God.

All that we know about our Master's boyhood, youth and early manhood we have given to us in these twelve, short verses of inspired history. We know absolutely nothing else about the earthly life of our Savior from his infancy until he was thirty years old, except that which is written in these twelve verses.

That is as it should be. God the Holy Spirit has given us everything that is needful and profitable for our souls. We would be wise to recognize this fact. It is both the depth of folly and the height of arrogance for men to speculate about things God has chosen not to reveal. It is an act of wisdom, faith and humility to simply believe and heed that which is revealed. Here, the Holy Spirit gives us the history of our Master's boyhood. May he graciously teach us the lessons it is intended to convey.

## Our Only Hope

As the believer's only hope of life before God is the death of Christ, our only rule of life is the example of Christ. Do you understand these two things? Our hope of salvation, eternal life, the forgiveness of sins and everlasting acceptance with the holy Lord God is the expiatory sacrifice and sin-atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We live by his death. Christ's payment canceled our debt. His obedience was our obedience. His judgment was our judgment. His death was our death. All the obedience he performed, all the agony he suffered, all the hell he endured, all the debt he paid was as our Surety! Our life is in his blood!

We are justified by his blood (Romans 5:9). We have forgiveness through his blood (Ephesians 1:7). We are reconciled to God by the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20). We drink his blood for the quenching of our souls' thirst (John 6:55). It is his blood that purges our consciences from dead works and satisfies the demands of the conscience (Hebrews 9:14). It is his blood by

which we are brought nigh (Ephesians 2:13), who were by nature far off from God. It is his blood that gives us peace (Colossians 1:20). His blood gives us free access to the holiest and emboldens us to come to God upon the blood sprinkled mercy-seat (Hebrews 10:19-22). We are sanctified by his blood (Hebrews 13:12). His blood is the purchase money and ransom price paid for the redemption of our souls (Acts 20:28). His blood is the seal of the everlasting covenant (Hebrews 13:20). His blood cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7, 9). His blood speaks for us in heaven (Hebrews 12:24). His blood will give us the victory at last (Rev. 12:11).

Dear, dying Lamb, Thy precious blood  
Shall never lose its power  
Till all the ransomed church of God  
Be saved to sin no more.

E'er since by faith I saw the stream  
Thy flowing wound supply,  
Redeeming love has been my theme  
And shall be till I die.

When this poor, lisping, stammering tongue  
Lies silent in the grave,  
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,  
I'll sing Thy power to save!

Our obedience has nothing to do with our salvation. We are saved by Christ's obedience unto death as our Substitute. If you would be saved, you must look away from yourself to Christ. You must trust Christ alone. Oh, may God give you grace to trust him now!

## Our Only Rule

Our only hope of life is Christ. That is the first thing, and the most difficult thing to be learned. The second thing is this: — The believer's rule of life, the pattern by which we must mold our lives in all things is the example of Christ. Our blessed Savior

was much, much more than an example for us to follow; but he was and is the example by which our lives must be molded. Is this not what he taught us (John 13:13-15; 1 Peter 2:21)? In the passage before us God the Holy Spirit gives us a very brief, but very instructive picture of the family life of our blessed Savior when he was a boy.

## Marriage

The first thing that strikes me in this passage is that it gives us a lesson about marriage (vv. 41-43)

“Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not *of it*.”

Husbands and wives ought to help one another in the worship and service of Christ. Joseph and Mary worshipped God together. Every year, at the appointed time, they went together to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of the Passover. It was their custom to observe all the ordinances of divine worship, in the appointed place, at the appointed time, in the appointed way. Joseph and Mary honored God, and honored him together.

The trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem was long, dangerous, difficult and costly. They did not have much; but all that they had in Nazareth, they left for at least two weeks three times a year to go up to Jerusalem to worship God.

Some would say this was a matter of great irresponsibility on their part. How could they, especially such a poor couple, be so irresponsible as to neglect their property for two weeks at a time? It was not irresponsibility at all, but faith. They believed the God they worshipped. He has promised to prevent us from suffering any loss by devotion to him. Has he not?

“Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. For I will cast

out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year.” (Exodus 34:23-24)

They knew God’s will; and they it. They knew that the worship of God was the one thing they had to do and had to have. And they worshipped their God together. Side by side, they walked into the house of God. Side by side, they prayed. Side by side, they sang Jehovah’s praise. Side by side, they heard his Word.

Let every married man and woman observe and learn from this couple. Let every man and woman contemplating marriage lay these things to heart. You will never make a decision so important as the decision you make about who you marry. Nothing will have a greater effect upon your soul for good or evil. The person you marry will either help you upward or drag you downward. Your marriage partner will either lead you to heaven or to hell.

Will you hear the counsel of God’s Word? Let me say what I have to say about this briefly, but with great plainness of speech. Seek your life long companion by divine guidance. Marriage is forever. Marry only in the Lord. Worship God as a family. I’ve never known anyone who gave heed to the counsel of these few sentences who regretted doing so. I know many who ignored this counsel who daily lament their rebellion.

Nothing is as important to you and your family as the public worship of our God and Savior. These days, men and women treat church attendance as a matter of convenience. I warn you, you do so only to the ruin of your own soul, and to the ruin of your family (Hebrews 10:23-25).

## Presumption

In verse 44 we see a second lesson. — *“They, supposing him to have been in the company.”*<sup>6</sup>. We should never presume upon the

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6 It was customary with the Jews, when traveling to the appointed feasts, for

goodness of God, or presume the Lord's presence with us in our most solemn services or our most diligent labors. I know the Lord's promises (Matt. 18:20; 28:20), and rejoice in them. But I know this too, if we would have the Lord's presence with us in his house, we must want it and seek it. If we would have his power and blessing upon our labors, we must need it and depend upon it. And if we would have Christ in our company, we must stay in his company.

## Obedience

Third, in the example of our blessed Savior, we are given a lesson about obedience (vv. 45-47)

“And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.”

Parents ought to see to it that their children obey them. Unruly, disobedient, ill-mannered children are produced by self-centered, selfish, irresponsible parents. And children will be wise to learn obedience. The surest path to happiness and well-being in this world is for children to honor and obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3). Our Savior left us an example to follow, even as a child. He subjected himself to his parents (v. 51). And that reverent subjection to his parents formed a part of the obedience he performed as our Surety, gaining him favor with God as a man (v. 52).

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the men to walk together in one group and the women in another, in large caravans. It is, therefore, perfectly understandable that Joseph presumed that the child was with Mary and the women, and that Mary presumed he was with Joseph and the men.

## Christianity

Fourth, in verse 49, we are given a lesson about Christianity. —  
“*And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*” What a solemn question! Let every child of God apply it to himself personally. It is our business in life to be about our Father's business. Christianity is living for God. May God the Holy Spirit give us grace to do so.

# Chapter 18

## The Making of a Prophet

### Luke 3:1-6

“Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways *shall be* made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:1-6).

These words describe the beginning of this gospel age. After four hundred years of silence, God spoke again. And the voice by which he spoke was John the Baptist, that mighty Elijah, specifically raised up by God to prepare the way of the Lord, by whom God shook the heavens and the earth.

In Ephesians 4:11 the Holy Spirit tells us that Christ’s ascension gifts to his church include apostles, pastors, teachers, evangelists and prophets. In that 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ephesians the Apostle was inspired of God to quote a portion of Psalm 68, which is a prophetic declaration of the accomplishments of Christ

as our Mediator. Redemption has been accomplished by the blood of Christ. His resurrection declares that the sins of God's elect, which were made his and imputed to him, have been put away by his sacrifice. The Man who died for us at Calvary is now enthroned in glory and has received gifts of grace, gifts which he daily bestows upon his church for the salvation of his people.

“The chariots of God *are* twenty thousand, *even* thousands of angels: the Lord *is* among them, *as in* Sinai, in the holy *place*. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, *for* the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell *among them*. Blessed *be* the Lord, *who* daily loadeth us *with benefits*, *even* the God of our salvation. Selah. *He that is* our God *is* the God of salvation; and unto GOD the Lord *belong* the issues from death” (Psalms 68:17-20).

These ascension gifts of Christ, as I said, include apostles, pastors, teachers, evangelists and prophets. It is obvious that there is no continuing apostolic or prophetic office in a strict sense. The last apostle was Paul, and the last prophet was John the Baptist. Evangelists, as the Word is used in the Word of God, are not itinerant preachers, but what we now call missionaries, church planters. Pastors and teachers are those men called and gifted of God for the work of the ministry, preaching the gospel in a local church, building up the saints in the faith, edifying the body of Christ. The words “*pastors and teachers*” might be read more accurately “*pastors/teachers*.” They do not refer to two separate offices, but to the work of the pastor.

## A Prophet

Because the term “prophet” is given as an ascension gift of Christ to his church, it is obvious that the word does not apply in this context to an office that was terminated before the Lord's ascension.

It is very difficult to find anything useful being said or written in our day on the ministry of these men. What is a prophet? The

word, as it is used regarding the New Testament era, seems to refer to men with extraordinary gifts, men who have a remarkable understanding of the Scriptures, men who have a keen awareness of the times in which they live and the message required to meet the need of the hour.

The work of the New Testament prophet is shrouded in indefiniteness and lost in a fog of haziness. We know the old definition, "A forthteller rather than a foreteller." We apply the term generally to preachers as spokesmen for God. But here is a distinctive calling separate from that of evangelist or pastor. Yet, the prophet may be an evangelist or a pastor.

A prophet, in this distinct sense of the word, appears to be a man distinctly gifted of God to lead his people in crucial times, with boldness and authority, which only God can give. Clearly, there were such men in the early church (Acts 11:27-28; 13:1). At least six are named in Acts 11 and 13: Agabus, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucious, Manaen and Saul.

There have never been many prophets, at least not many true prophets. But are there none? Our times cry for such men. Is there not a prophet? Are there none today to stand in the gap and dare speak for God? Never was the need greater and the supply smaller than today.

The prophet is a voice in the wilderness. It is his business to sound the trumpet, proclaim the Word of God, and press the claims of the sovereign God upon the hearts and lives of men. He does not work on details or set up programs. He does not devise schemes to raise funds or plan stage productions. A prophet does not belong on boards and committees. He is a solitary soul and does his best work alone. He is not a parrot, a puppet or a promoter. A prophet is never a team player. He is not a religious politician. He is a voice, a lone, dogmatic voice.

He is nothing but a prophet. If he tries to be or do anything else, he is an embarrassment to himself and to everyone around him. He is not a politician; and he is never popular with politicians either in state or church. He is not cowed by dignitaries. When necessary, he will call Herod a fox, even when

he knows it may cost him his life.

A prophet is an unreconstructed rebel, an odd number in a day of regimentation. He has no more patience with mere religion than Isaiah had when he thundered against it, or Amos when he called on Israel to come to Bethel. It is his business to say what others cannot, will not, or at least do not say.

The politician has his eye on the next election, instead of the nation's welfare. And I fear most preachers are more politician than prophet. They are more interested in your approval than your soul. They have their eyes on denominational promotion, the next rung of the ladder, a higher seat in the synagogue, and being called a rabbi.

The prophet has no ax to grind, but lays the ax of Holy Scripture to the root of every tree in the groves of the world's idolatry. He does not know the meaning of the word "compromise." His subject never varies. He relentlessly calls rebels to surrender, demanding utter surrender to the claims of Christ, the crucified, risen, exalted Lord. — "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" — "*All flesh is grass!*" — "*Behold, your God!*" — "*Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!*"

As far as God's prophet is concerned, the grass is no greener in the next pasture. He seeks no man's office, position or honor. His concern is for the will, and glory, and truth, and kingdom of God.

Churches today are looking for scholars, specialists, socializers and showmen. We need some seers, some prophets who, like Isaiah, have seen God in His holiness, themselves in their sinfulness, and the crucified Lamb of God in the midst of His throne.

The prophet does not pack the house, or produce impressive statistics. He may get but poor response; but whether they hear or not, those who hear him know that a prophet has been among them. People do not crowd churches to hear prophets. In an age of ear-itch religionists, most everyone calls God's prophets "troublers of Israel." And wherever a prophet's voice is heard,

trouble, of one kind or another, is sure to follow. Whenever John the Baptist, or the Apostle Paul came to town, whether they preached in the church-house, the jail-house, or the open fields, either a revival or a riot broke out. No one ignores a prophet!

The prophet is never popular with the Pharisees, and has no desire to be. Organized religion is never more organized than when it attempts to silence a prophet. "*Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?*" "*Ye are the children of them that killed the prophets.*" So said the greatest of prophets to the Pharisees of his day. From Abel to Zacharias, our Master said, prophets have been stoned while living and honored when dead. Let no one be misled by the monuments men build to dead prophets. They are only the gestures and attempts of one generation to cover up the crimes of their fathers in preceding generations.

The prophet is not popular at home. In all four gospels we read our Lord's declaration, "*A prophet is not without honor save in his own country and in his own house.*" But prophets do have their reward, and so do those who befriend them, even with a cup of cool water. God will not overlook the "prophet's chamber," where his unpopular servant has been made to feel at home.

There are not many candidates for Elijah's mantle. His path is not an easy path to follow. There are many ways of getting rid of prophets. John the Baptist's head is not brought in on a charger these days. There are smoother and more skillful ways of silencing lone dissenters like Micaiah in these days of refined malice against God. Some can even be promoted into silence. Success has stopped some mouths when persecution failed.

Like John the Baptist, the prophet is out to pull down the high places, build up low places, and make a way for the Lord. His theological interpretation of Holy Scripture is not a matter of learned speculation, but of passionate conviction. His preaching is not intended to make sinners feel good about themselves, but to bring them down in the dust before God by the burning, penetrating application of His Word to their hearts. Others may comfort when afflicted; but the prophet afflicts the comfortable. We are trying to accomplish now by pep, publicity, propaganda

and promotion what once was done by preaching. The woods are full of trained religious personnel, (They are called preachers!); but we need prophets, men in whom the Word of the Lord burns like fire, men who carry and are weighed down with “*the burden of the Word of the Lord!*”

Any young Elisha in line for Elijah's mantle will need the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child and the hide of a rhinoceros. He may irk those who like to preserve the status quo, for he is a disturber of Israel, but no one else can take his place. Oh, may God raise up some prophets in our midst in this dark, dark day!

Perhaps He will cause some Samuel to read these lines long after my name is forgotten among men, who will hear what the Lord says and who will speak what he hears. There is not much prospect as to pay, promotion or prestige. But there has always been “*yet one man*” who will scorn the hatred of Ahab and seek the honor of God.

Luke 3:1-6 describes the making of such a man, the making of a prophet. Prophets are made, called, gifted, raised up and sent forth by God, at the time and in the place where they are needed, to “*prepare the way of the Lord!*”

## Desperately Needed

God raises up a prophet when a prophet is desperately needed. I cannot think of a time in Scripture when God raised up a prophet to twiddle his thumbs, sipping tea with old ladies, coaching little league ball teams, or running businesses. God's prophets are raised up to meet the crying need of His people in the hour of desperate need, with evil abounding on all sides. He raised up Moses to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage. He sent Samuel to find His chosen king for Israel and establish him as God's King. The Lord God called Elijah to lead Israel, while Ahab and Jezebel sought to establish idolatry. He sent Isaiah to proclaim His salvation, when all hope seemed to be gone. And He raised up Jeremiah to prepare the people for judgment.

In a time of desperate need the God of Glory raised up John the Baptist, as a mighty Elijah, to prepare the way of the Lord. Verses 1 and 2 tell us that John the Baptist was sent into the world at a time of abounding social, political and spiritual wickedness.

Who can imagine a time more infamously evil than the days of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod and his brother, Philip? These men made our modern Washington crowd look like a bunch of Augustinian monks! When John the Baptist came preaching the gospel, the world seemed to be given over completely into the hands of the wicked. As Job put it, “*The earth is given into the hand of the wicked*” – (Job 9:24). If these men were the rulers of the world, what must the people have been like?

The religious world was in just as sad a condition as the political world. In fact, religion was so degenerate, even among the Jews, that it was just a reflection of the world. Instead of converting the world, the world had converted the church. Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests.

The Word of God specifically stated that there was to be but one high priest; but the Word of God was no longer in vogue. It was irrelevant as far as the religion of the age was concerned. The church, the priests, the preachers, the religious leaders of the age did everything, gauged everything, made every judgment, and formed every doctrinal statement by opinion polls, by the opinions of a godless, reprobate people!

We must never be in despair regarding the truth of God and the cause of God in this world, no matter how bleak things may appear. Let us never allow the wickedness of the age in which we live deter us from the work God has given us. — “*He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap*” (Ecclesiastes 11:4). What God has done in the past, he can do again. – When darkness abounds, it is only a good background upon which God may be pleased to show forth his blazing glory in Christ!

## Distinctly Called

A prophet is a man distinctly called of God. – *“The word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah in the wilderness”* (v. 2). A message from heaven came upon his heart, seized his soul, captivated his mind and took over his life. I do not know how to put my finger on it, but I know this: – No man has any business engaging in the work of the ministry who has not been called of God to the work. He who runs without being sent, has no message to deliver, no work to do, no mandate to accomplish. But when a man is called of God, he knows exactly what he must do. He knows exactly what his message is. And he goes about his work with the tenacity of a mule and the courage of a lion.

If a man is called of God to this great and glorious, heart-rending work, he knows the Word of the Lord, the message of the Gospel. He is gifted of God to preach the gospel, *“apt to teach.”* Such a man does not have to look for a place to preach, or promote himself in any way. God puts him in the work. John was in the wilderness when the word of the Lord came to him. If a man is called of God, God gives him a hearing; and he is engaged in the work. This call of God separates the man called and gifted of God unto the work of the Gospel (Romans 1:1-4). No man is called of God to preach the Gospel who is not preaching the Gospel.

## Clear Message

God’s prophet is a man with a message, a clear, distinct message from God, demanding the surrender of rebels to the throne of the great King! — *“And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”* (v. 3). The *“baptism of repentance”* (believer’s immersion) is the Gospel ordinance by which believing sinners are commanded and delight to confess their faith in Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:36; 10:48; 22:16). In the ordinance of baptism we symbolize the finished work of our Lord Jesus, our death, burial and resurrection with Him as our Substitute.

The words, “*for the remission of sins,*” should be read, “because of the remission of sins.” We are not baptized to have our sins remitted. We are baptized because Christ has put away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. Baptism is the believer’s declaration that he has been turned to God by Christ Jesus. John came preaching repentance, the turning of sinners to God by the Savior; the very same message Gospel preachers in every age are sent to proclaim, redemption accomplished by the crucified Savior (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

God’s prophet is a man who knows who he is and what he must do. He is just a voice. It is his business to prepare the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight.

“As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways *shall be* made smooth” (vv. 4-5).

Every Gospel preacher is sent of God to tell eternity bound sinners that they must prepare to meet God, to tell them by what path God comes to them and by what path they must come to Him, and to declare it plainly. It is the business of God’s ambassador to your soul, as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, to fill up every valley, pull down every barrier, make every crooked thing straight and every rough thing smooth, which stands between your soul and your God.

God’s prophet is a man who goes about his work with the confidence of absolute success. We know that our work is not in vain in the Lord. We know that God’s Word will not return to him void. It will accomplish that which he pleased. It will prosper in the thing to which he sends it. And when our work is done – “*All flesh shall see the salvation of God*” (v. 6). You will see God’s salvation, either as a believer or as a rebel; but see it you will, either to the saving of your soul or to the damning of your soul (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). You will acknowledge and confess the salvation of God, either in the blessed experience of

repentance, or in the horrifying experience of everlasting torment.

*Prepare to meet thy God!*” Are you, or are you not prepared to meet God? Are you washed in the blood of his dear Son? Are you robed in his righteousness? Do you have on the wedding garment of his grace? Are you prepared to meet God?

# Chapter 19

## Baptist Preaching

### Luke 3:7-14

“Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse *any* falsely; and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:7-14).

John the Baptist was no ordinary man in any sense of the word “ordinary.” He was a remarkable man, a remarkable believer and a remarkable preacher. It was impossible to ignore him, or pretend he was not around. Though few who heard him believed his message, everyone who heard him was affected by what they heard.

In the eleventh chapter of Matthew our Lord gave His own

opinion about John the Baptist. Read what He says there about this remarkable man.

“And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” (Matthew 11:7-11)

A preacher of such character and influence is a preacher whose example all preachers ought to follow. He sets the pattern for what preaching is and how it is to be done. What were the leading features of the Baptist’s ministry? What were the primary characteristics of his preaching? These things are clearly set before us in the inspired record given by Luke in the passage before us.

John the Baptist’s work as God’s prophet, as a preacher, is to be measured, like every preacher’s work is to be measured, not by his traits of personality, oratorical ability, social graces, and theological acumen, but by his message, by what he preached. In the inspired record of John’s life and ministry five things stick out as distinct characteristics of the Baptist’s preaching.

## Redemption by the Blood

*First*, and foremost, the first Baptist preacher preached redemption and remission of sins by the blood of Christ. John came preparing the way of the Lord, preaching the baptism of repentance, because of the remission of sins (v. 3). He incessantly pointed sinners to Christ, calling upon all who heard him to trust, love and follow Christ. Even when he was in prison, about to be

sacrificed for his faithfulness, he sent his disciples to the Lord Jesus to have the Savior's person and work confirmed to them by the Savior himself (Matthew 11:2-6). In the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of John's Gospel John the apostle speaks in glowing terms about John the Baptist and his preaching (John 1:15-30, 34-37).

Blessed is that man whose preaching is full of Christ, who spends his time and uses his opportunities to talk to eternity bound sinners about the precious blood of the Lamb of God. Blessed are they who hear him (Isaiah 52:7). All who know Christ esteem his blood precious; and all who preach Christ preach his blood precious (1 Peter 1:18-20). His blood is precious blood because it is His blood, the blood of God incarnate (Acts 20:28). It is sin-atonement blood (Romans 3:24; 5:11). Our Savior's blood is eternally efficacious blood (Hebrews 9:12; Ephesians 1:7). It is divinely ordained blood, blood shed by the purpose of God (Acts 2:23). And the blood of Christ is precious because it is redeeming blood (Galatians 3:13-14)".

“E'er since by faith I saw the streams  
Thy flowing wounds supply,  
Redeeming love has been my theme  
And shall be till I die!”

The Baptist's preaching was the preaching of blood atonement by the crucified Lamb of God. Paul's motto was his motto. Indeed, this is the motto of every preacher called and sent of God. — *“I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified”* (1 Corinthians 2:2). — *“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Galatians 6:14).

## Holy Boldness

*Second*, John the Baptist knew that he spoke for God, with God's power and authority, and, therefore, preached with a confidence that gave him holy boldness and courage before men. John the Baptist was a man, not a sissy, or a wimp, but a man. He was not a reed shaken in the wind, bending with the breeze of popular opinion. This was not a pampered pastor who dared not offend

those who pampered him. John the Baptist was God's servant. You could tell it when he preached

“Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (vv. 7-8).

He saw the rottenness and hypocrisy of the religious world around him, and denounced it with pointed sharpness. His head was not turned by popularity. He courted no man's favor and feared no man's frown. He cared not who might be offended by his message.

The spiritual disease of those standing before him was desperate. He knew desperate disease required desperate measures. John the Baptist lived in desperate times, much like our own. He knew that the day in which he lived demanded desperate plainness of speech.

How sad it is that there are so few like this first Baptist preacher today! These days, the first, primary rule of preaching is — “Do not offend!” Preachers have a castrating fear of giving offense by direct, forthright, plain preaching.

If a man would be faithful to your souls, he cannot flatter you. If he would do you good, he dare not flinch from exposing your inmost corruption and sin by the Word of God, demanding and pressing upon you the claims of Christ, forcing you, if he can, to repentance toward God and faith in Christ. If a man's object in preaching is to please you, rather than serve your soul's eternal good, he is not the servant of God (Luke 6:26; Galatians 1:10).

Because he was God's servant, John told these people three things, which are true of and ought to be declared to all men: (1.) They were a generation of vipers, as deceitful as they were vile. (2.) They were under and fully deserving of the wrath of God. And (3.) God did not need them to fulfil himself or make himself

happy. John told these proud sons of Abraham, “*God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*”

When John the Baptist demanded that those he baptized “*bring forth fruits worthy of repentance,*” the word translated “*bring forth*” is the very same word used by the apostle in 1 John 3:4 and 7, when he tells us that people “committing sin” are yet without Christ, and that those “doing righteousness” have been made righteous. The word has the idea of practice, not of acts. Fruits “*worthy of repentance,*” fruits that show repentance to be genuine are “*the fruit of the Spirit*” produced and formed in the believer, fruits reflected in the believer’s practice of life (Galatians 5:22-23). A person’s true character is seen, not in isolated acts, but in the habit of his life.

## Everlasting Hell

John the Baptist spoke plainly and forcibly about the wrath of God and everlasting damnation in hell. He did not hold back the fact that there is “*wrath to come.*” He faithfully warned all who heard him that God cut down every unprofitable tree and “*cast it into the fire.*”

The subjects of divine justice, judgment, wrath and the everlasting torments of the damned in the fires of hell are always offensive to human nature. Men do not like to hear that they are going to hell. They do not mind hearing that other people are going to hell. Just don’t suggest, much less plainly declare, that they, or those they love are going to hell. It is the nature of all men to love to hear smooth things, not peril, danger and punishment.

People are willing to pay false prophets good money to tell them what they want to hear (Isaiah 30:10). But that man who is faithful to God, faithful to the Book and faithful to your soul will, like John the Baptist, like Christ himself, like all the prophets of old, and like all the apostles, warn you, with passion in his soul, to “*flee from the wrath to come.*”

The fear of hell is not the primary motive for repentance and

faith in Christ; but you will never seek heaven until you fear going to hell. You will never seek God's salvation until you fear God's wrath. You will never flee to Christ, the sinner's only City of Refuge, until the avenger of justice is on your trail.

Hell is real. God almighty must and will punish sin. It is that God who swears, "*the soul that sinneth, it shall die,*" who drove Adam and Eve out of the garden, destroyed the world in the flood of his wrath, rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah, nailed his on Son upon the cursed tree and poured out on him all the fires of hell for his people, when he was made sin for us.

## Axe to Root

In his preaching the Baptist laid the axe to the root of every fruitless tree. With earnestness and conviction, he endeavored to destroy every refuge of lies in which sinners seek to hide from God.

"And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (v. 9).

When the multitudes of religious people, whose lives were manifestly wicked, stood before him, he plainly declared to their faces in public that they were hypocrites. It is vain to say with our lips, "I believe God," if by our works we deny him. It is worse than vain. Such hypocrisy will gradually harden the heart and sear the conscience. A confession of faith without the consecration of faith is hypocrisy. Baptism without death and resurrection life in Christ is a sham. Eating the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, if I do not feed upon the Redeemer's flesh and blood, is eating and drinking damnation to myself. To use the words of Inspiration, "*Faith without works is dead!*" Such faith is nothing but the faith of devils (James 2:14-26).

John boldly and plainly denounced the commonly held notion of covenant family salvation. The Jews, like multitudes today, thought they were certainly saved people, children of God,

because they were Abraham's descendants. John told them that their pedigree was no claim to grace (v. 8). Saving faith is a personal thing. It is not a family heirloom (John 1:12-13). When Paul said to the Philippian jailer, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house,*" he was not saying, "If you believe, God will save everyone (or anyone) in your house." He was saying, "If you believe, you will be saved, and if your family believes, they will be saved as well."

## Doing Right

John the Baptist faithfully brought the gospel home to the hearts and lives of his hearers in the most practical way possible (Luke 3:10-14). When the people asked him, "*What shall we do then?*" he told each one who professed faith in Christ by believer's baptism to live according to his profession, for the glory of God. He said to them all, live no longer in selfish, self-centered gratification, but in love, kindness, charity and generosity. Is that not the obvious meaning of verse 11? — "*He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.*"

The Baptist told the converted publicans to be fair and honest with all men, especially because the publicans were known for both dishonesty and severity. — "*Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you*" (vv. 12-13).

John told those soldiers who were converted by the grace of God to take care not to be violent and abusive with people under their power, and to be content with God's provision. — "*And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages*" (v. 14).

It should also be noted that John said nothing to indicate anything unlawful about either paying taxes or collecting them, or about serving as a soldier. Remember, these publicans and

soldiers were employees of the Roman Empire, one of the most morally corrupt, idolatrous systems of government the world has ever known. Our business is not with the kings of this world, but with the King of the world. Our concern is not the establishment or governing of kingdoms and nations, but with the kingdom of God.

These five things characterized the Baptist's preaching.

1. The Preaching of Blood Redemption by Christ.
2. Courage and Boldness for the Glory of God.
3. Plain Warnings about the Wrath of God.
4. Plainness of Speech in Destroying the Refuges in which Sinners would Hide from God.
5. Godly Behavior.

Oh, may God be pleased to revive such preaching in these dark, dark days, for the glory of Christ and the everlasting good of His elect!

# Chapter 20

## John the Baptist A Faithful Preacher

Luke 3:15-20

“And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; John answered, saying unto *them* all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison” (Luke 3:15-20).

The greatest blessing God bestows upon men and women this side of eternity is the gift of a faithful Gospel preacher in their midst (Isaiah 52:7-8). What a blessing it is for God to plant a Gospel church with a faithful pastor in your backyard! The most severe judgment God sends upon men this side of eternity is the judgment of taking from them the ministry of the Gospel, the faithful preaching of the Word of God, God's ordained means of grace to chosen, redeemed sinners (Romans 10:17).

In these verses of Scripture Luke gives us his final word about the life and ministry of John the Baptist. In the first twenty

verses of this chapter the Holy Spirit directed Luke's pen in showing us the faithfulness of John the Baptist as a preacher of the Gospel, holding him before us as an example to be followed by all who are called and sent of God into the glorious work of the Gospel ministry.

In the verses now before us Luke uses John's example to show us five distinct characteristics of a faithful preacher. But Luke is not here addressing preachers. He is addressing God's saints. This is God's Word to you and me. You see, that which the Scriptures require of faithful, Gospel preachers is also required of all faithful men and women. All believers are God's servants; and the one thing God requires of us all is faithfulness (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).

One of my unceasing, daily prayers is that God would be pleased to make me faithful in all things, as His servant. Knowing something of the fickleness of my own heart, I know that if faithfulness is found in me, it will be God's doing. The Lord has made this a matter of constant prayer with me for more than forty years. And the older I get, the more I know of the things of God and of my own nature, the more I see the power and deceitfulness of the cares of this world, the more earnest I am in asking this one thing of my God. Oh, for grace to be faithful to my God, His Son, His Word, His will, His glory, and His people! What does this faithfulness involve? — At least these five things.

## 1. A faithful ministry disturbs men.

True preaching is disturbing, heart-piercing, thought provoking. It disturbs men, especially religious men. Luke tells us that when men and women (religious men and women, men and women who presumed that they knew God) heard the Baptist preach, they were *"in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ."*

The word *"mused"* means reasoned, considered, weighed. When people heard John preach, they were provoked to thoughtful consideration of his message. When a man comes from the throne of God with a message from God, preaching with

a God-given knowledge and understanding, he simply cannot be ignored. Those who hear his message are compelled to weigh his words.

That is always a hopeful sign. I am always delighted to see people evidently considering the things of God. When men and women begin to think, I rejoice. Thinking is not faith. Consideration is not conversion. But it is a hopeful sign.

The Gospel of the grace of God, the Word of God, the truth of God is always verified by honest examination. Truth never fears examination. The problem with most people is that God is not in their thoughts. They never consider divine truth (Psalm 10:4; Isaiah 1:3). If you are not in too big a hurry to go to hell, you would be wise to get alone with God and this Book, and consider just three things.

- Pause for a while and consider who and what you are.
- Take a little time to consider who the Lord Jesus Christ is, why he came into this world and what he has done. – *“Consider how great this man was!”* — *“Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself!”*
- Will you stop for a while and consider your end?

“But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or *that* thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest *and* speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother’s son. These *things* hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether *such an one* as thyself: *but* I will reprove thee, and set *them* in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and *there be* none to deliver. Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth *his*

conversation *aright* will I shew the salvation of God” (Psalms 50:16-23).

God’s servants make no effort to avoid examination. We court it. I know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that the Gospel I preach is the truth of God. I know that it will answer every need of your heart and every demand of your conscience.

## 2. A faithful preacher always exalts Christ.

When men came seeking to confer great and high honors upon John, he turned their thoughts away from himself to Christ. As the friend of the bridegroom rejoices in the glory of the bridegroom, so the servant of God rejoices in the glory of Christ, and seeks none for himself (John 3:29-30). — Faithful men serve Christ, exalt Christ, point sinners to Christ, and preach Christ. They do not serve their own interests (1 Corinthians 4:1-5; 2 Corinthians 4:1-5).

“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.” (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this

world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." (2 Corinthians 4:1-5)

By this standard every man's ministry must be judged. Does he preach Christ? Does he point sinners to Christ? Does he exalt, magnify, extol and honor Christ? — As the Son of God? — As the Lord our Righteousness? — As the effectual Redeemer? — As the sovereign Savior? — As the Monarch of the Universe? It matters not how learned he is, how many degrees he wears, how well he dresses, or even how well he speaks. The thing that matters is what he speaks. Does he preach Christ?

By this same standard judge all doctrine, all religious activity and all religious instruction. — Does it point you to Christ, make you think more of Christ, cause you to lean on Christ, or does it point you to yourself, cause you to think of yourself and cause you to lean on yourself, on the church and on the pastor?

### 3. A faithful preacher knows and will always acknowledge his own inabilities.

When the people presumed that John was himself the Christ, he quickly pointed out that he not only was not the Christ, but that he was utterly incapable of doing anything for their souls. — *"John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire"* (v. 16).

That is exactly what Paul had to deal with in 1 Corinthians 1-3. The power and efficacy of the Gospel does not depend upon the preacher, but upon Christ. *"Our sufficiency is of God."* — A man can preach the Gospel to you; but a man cannot make you believe it. — A man can see the expressions on your face; but a man cannot read your heart. — A man can baptize you in water; but a man cannot put you in Christ. — A man can give you the

bread and wine of the Lord's Supper; but a man cannot cause you to eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood. — A man can show you the way; but a man cannot put you in the way. That is God's work!

*“John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:”* — Essentially, John is saying three things here. These three things every Gospel preacher is keenly and acutely aware of, all the time.

- I cannot save you or damn you. — I am neither your savior nor your judge. — You should not expect anything from me, or confess anything to me.
- I am not worthy of your slightest esteem, reverence, or praise. — I'm not fit to untie my Master's shoes. I am honored beyond imagination, if he allows me to just take off his shoes.
- The Lord Jesus Christ is both the Savior of the world and the Judge of the world. — He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. That is to say, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit in His almighty saving grace. If you do not bow to Him, if you are not saved by His grace, He will baptize you with fire in the Day of Judgment.

Be wise. Do not rest with anything less than the operation of Christ himself in your soul. You may have been immersed in water; but has Christ immersed you in grace? Your name is written on this church roll; but is your name written in heaven? You eat the bread and wine at the Lord's Table; but are you feasting on Christ? Do not settle for the outward husks of religion. Make certain that Christ is yours. Soon, you will stand before His bar. How will it be for your soul that great and terrible day?

#### 4. Faithful men constantly point eternity bound sinners

to death, judgment and eternity.

John spoke of the Lord Jesus as that One “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable” (v. 17).

There is a day of reckoning. One day soon we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, the great white throne. In that great day all things will be made manifest. In this world the kingdom of God is a field full of mixed seed, wheat and tares. The church is a fold of sheep and goats. Every Gospel church is a mixed assembly of believers and unbelievers, saints and hypocrites, possessors of grace and professors of grace.

No man, no group of men is able to distinguish one from the other. None of us can distinguish sheep from goats, wheat from tares, and saints from hypocrites. We are too easily deceived. Therefore our Lord tells us to let them grow together. But there is a day coming, when He who knows all things will separate the precious from the vile. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.

## 5. Faithful men are faithful unto death.

“And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison” (vv. 18-20).

Time is the great revealer. In time you and I will all show our cards. We will eventually make ourselves known. We may not make ourselves known to ourselves; but we will be obvious to everyone else. Believers continue in faith. Faithful men and women are faithful to the end, no matter what it cost.

I did not say faithful people do not sin. I said they continue in faithfulness. They continue in the way. They continue to follow Christ, until they are with him in Glory. And faithful preachers

are faithful unto death, just like John the Baptist. May God make us faithful. Let us be found faithful unto the end.

# Chapter 21

## Lessons from the Master's Baptism and His Genealogy

Luke 3:21-38

“Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was *the son* of Heli, Which was *the son* of Matthat, which was *the son* of Levi, which was *the son* of Melchi, which was *the son* of Janna, which was *the son* of Joseph, Which was *the son* of Mattathias, which was *the son* of Amos, which was *the son* of Naum, which was *the son* of Esli, which was *the son* of Nagge, Which was *the son* of Maath, which was *the son* of Mattathias, which was *the son* of Semei, which was *the son* of Joseph, which was *the son* of Juda, Which was *the son* of Joanna, which was *the son* of Rhesa, which was *the son* of Zorobabel, which was *the son* of Salathiel, which was *the son* of Neri, Which was *the son* of Melchi, which was *the son* of Addi, which was *the son* of Cosam, which was *the son* of Elmodam, which was *the son* of Er, Which was *the son* of Jose, which was *the son* of Eliezer, which was *the son* of Jorim, which was *the son* of Matthat, which was *the son* of Levi, Which was *the son* of Simeon, which was *the son* of Juda, which was *the son* of Joseph, which was *the son*

of Jonan, which was *the son* of Eliakim, Which was *the son* of Melea, which was *the son* of Menan, which was *the son* of Mattatha, which was *the son* of Nathan, which was *the son* of David, Which was *the son* of Jesse, which was *the son* of Obed, which was *the son* of Booz, which was *the son* of Salmon, which was *the son* of Naasson, Which was *the son* of Aminadab, which was *the son* of Aram, which was *the son* of Esrom, which was *the son* of Phares, which was *the son* of Juda, Which was *the son* of Jacob, which was *the son* of Isaac, which was *the son* of Abraham, which was *the son* of Thara, which was *the son* of Nachor, Which was *the son* of Saruch, which was *the son* of Ragau, which was *the son* of Phalec, which was *the son* of Heber, which was *the son* of Sala, Which was *the son* of Cainan, which was *the son* of Arphaxad, which was *the son* of Sem, which was *the son* of Noe, which was *the son* of Lamech, Which was *the son* of Mathusala, which was *the son* of Enoch, which was *the son* of Jared, which was *the son* of Maleleel, which was *the son* of Cainan, Which was *the son* of Enos, which was *the son* of Seth, which was *the son* of Adam, which was *the son* of God” (Luke 3:21-38).

We know virtually nothing about the childhood, youth, teenage years and early adulthood of our Savior. We know he was born at Bethlehem, that Joseph and Mary fled with him to Egypt when he was about two years old and that he was found in the temple conversing with the religious leaders of the temple when he was twelve. We know nothing else about our Lord’s earthly existence until he was thirty years old. All three of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) begin to describe our Lord’s life and ministry as a man in exactly the same way — at his baptism. That fact alone makes his baptism and ours matters of tremendous importance.

## Baptism and Faith

In the Word of God baptism and faith always go together (Acts

8:36-38). Baptism is distinctly an ordinance of the New Testament. It is a distinctly Gospel ordinance. There was nothing like it in the Old Testament, and nothing pointing to it.

Many have the notion that John's baptism was somehow different from the baptism practiced by our Lord, His disciples and us; but there is not a shred of evidence for that notion. There is no evidence that any of our Lord's disciples were baptized by anyone, except John. John's baptism, like ours, was the baptism of repentance because of the remission of sins (v. 3). And John's baptism, like ours, was the symbolic fulfillment of righteousness (Matthew 3:13-17). It was a picture of redemption, a picture of the Gospel. It was a picture not of cleansing by the gift of life, but of ransom by the death of Christ, not of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, but of redemption by the obedience of Christ unto death as our Substitute.

“Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer *it to be so* now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:13-17)

John's baptism, like ours, was an act by which men and women publicly renounced their former religion and publicly identified themselves with Christ and his people.

Our Lord Jesus treated this blessed ordinance of the gospel as a matter of highest esteem, giving it great honor, and placing great importance upon it. He walked all the way from Galilee to the Jordan River in order to be immersed by John the Baptist.

Baptism must never be regarded by us as a point of indifference, or a matter of slight importance. This is the ordinance of Christ, an ordinance of divine worship, which our

Master commands us to keep.

I will say no more in this study about this blessed ordinance of the Gospel than is here specifically stated by God the Holy Spirit. I have no creed to defend, no denomination to uphold, no tradition to maintain. I make no effort to mold the Scriptures to a confession of faith. Believers mold their faith, their doctrine and their practices to the Word of God.

Here are five things taught throughout the New Testament and clearly set before us in our Savior's example. These five things are so obvious, so plainly set before us, that none can misunderstand them or fail to see them, except those who are willfully blinded by religious tradition.

1. Baptism is an ordinance of worship, not a sacrament. That distinction is important. An ordinance is a rule or command. A sacrament is an outward sign of an inward grace, or a means by which grace is conferred. Our Lord's baptism conferred no grace upon him. It washed away no sin from him. And it was not a sign of anything inward. It was that which He was behoved to do as Jehovah's Servant, because it symbolized the fulfillment of all righteousness by His obedience unto death.
2. Baptism is immersion. Immersion is not a mode, or even the mode of baptism. Immersion is baptism. That is what the word means. Without immersion, there is no baptism. Sprinkling is not immersion. It is sprinkling. Pouring is not immersion. It is pouring. Baptism is immersion.
3. Baptism is for adults only. Our Lord Jesus was thirty years old when He came to be baptized by John.
4. Baptism is for believers only. The necessary prerequisite to baptism is faith (Acts 8:36-38). We are specifically told that our Savior was praying when he was baptized. The practice of sprinkling and/or pouring water on infants, and calling the

ritual, “baptism,” is as foreign to the Scriptures as rosary beads! If we would worship God, we must not add to his Word, or alter his ordinance.

5. Our baptism as believers, as followers of Christ, is a reflection of our Lord’s baptism (Romans 6:3-6). In this blessed ordinance of worship believers are buried with Christ in the watery grave and rise with Him from the grave, because that is exactly what has happened to every regenerate person. When Christ died, we died with Him. When He arose, we arose with Him. In our baptism we confess to the world that we trust Christ and His obedience unto death as our Substitute for the whole of our salvation, and that we have been raised from death to life by His Spirit.

## The Trinity and Redemption

When our Lord Jesus was baptized, all three Persons in the Godhead displayed a manifest concern in the affair of our redemption. God the Son was baptized. God the Spirit descended upon Him in an openly revealed physical form, as a dove. And God the Father spoke from heaven.

We worship the Triune God, the Three-in-One Jehovah. — *“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one”* (1 John 5:7). Throughout the New Testament, we see the fact of the Holy Trinity and the involvement of all three of the divine Persons in the work of grace. Both in the baptismal requirement that believer’s be baptized *“in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”* (Matthew 28:19), and in the benedictions of grace from the Triune God upon the churches (2 Corinthians 13:14), we are taught that the three of the Godhead are engaged to save chosen sinners. And this fact is asserted with clarity in Ephesians 1:3-14, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 and 1 Peter 1:2).

No man can comprehend  
The mighty Three-in-One,

Or fathom what to rescue man,  
The Triune God has done.  
With confidence we boast  
What nature never learned,  
That Father, Son, and Holy Ghost  
To save are all concerned.

The Father's love, so grand,  
His Son did sacrifice!  
The Son for us His life resigned.  
The Spirit grace applies.  
The Trinity we praise,  
Through Jesus Christ, our King.  
With gratitude and love we raise  
Our voice His praise to sing.

To God the Father be,  
Who sent His Son to die,  
Glory, and to the Son for He  
Most willingly complied!  
Praise God the Holy Ghost,  
Who in Jesus reveals  
God's love and grace for sinners lost,  
And His salvation seals!

## **Grace and Mediation**

We have before us a marvelous display of our Lord's covenant office as our God-man Mediator. The voice which spoke from heaven said, *"Thou art my beloved Son. In thee I am well pleased."*

The only way God almighty can or will save fallen, guilty sinners is through a Mediator. And the Lord Jesus Christ is the Mediator, the only Mediator there is, between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5). Everything God has for sinners, everything God requires of sinners and everything God gives to sinners is *"in Him,"* in Christ. He who is Mediator between God and men must

be both God and man. And He who is our Mediator must be one in whom God is well pleased. The Lord God is well pleased with our Redeemer's holy and infinitely meritorious nature as our God-man Mediator. He is well pleased with our Representative's holy life of perfect obedience for us. He is well pleased with our Substitute's death, by which He made complete satisfaction to divine justice, by the sacrifice of Himself in the room and place of His people.

The Lord God is well pleased with the merit, the infinite merit of Christ's obedience unto death as our Substitute, but there is more stated here than that. When the Lord God said, "*Thou art my beloved Son. In thee I am well pleased,*" He declared that He is well please not just with His Son, but well pleased in His Son. — God almighty is well pleased with his people in his Son! Read the Scriptures and rejoice. If you are in Christ, God is well pleased with you in Him (Ephesians 1:3-6; Numbers 23:21; Psalm 32:1-2; Romans 4:8; Jeremiah 50:20; Ecclesiastes 9:7).

“Bold shall I stand in that great day,  
For who aught to my charge shall lay,  
While through Christ's blood absolved I am,  
From sin's tremendous curse and blame!”

## Humanity and Death

In verses 23-38 we have a long list of names. Here we are given the names of 75 people. Were it not for the fact that their names are in this genealogical record<sup>7</sup>, most of the names would have

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<sup>7</sup> All who read the Scriptures with care know that there is some difficulty reconciling the records of our Lord's genealogy. If we compare Matthew's account with Luke's account, there appears to be an obvious conflict in the recorded names given between David and Joseph. Between David and Abraham, Matthew's record and Luke's agree. But between David and Joseph, they appear to be two different family trees. In all likelihood there are. It appears that Luke was inspired to give us our Lord's maternal genealogy, while Matthew and Mark give us his paternal genealogy. Heli, being Mary's father, would have been Joseph's father-in-law, his father by marriage. He would have been listed as such in the maternal genealogy of the family.

long ago gone into oblivion. Who remembers them? Who cares who they were, where they lived, what they did or what they had? No one!

What frail, dying creatures we are! Like us, these men all once lived upon the earth. They had the same joys we have, the same sorrows, the same griefs and the same troubles. As we all soon must, all these men died and are buried in the earth. Each one has now gone to his own place, as soon we must.

Yes, we too are passing away and soon must be gone. Let us forever bless God and give thanks to him that in this dying world we have a living Savior! Let us make it our one great concern to be joined to Him, who is the Resurrection and the Life. May God give us grace to live day by day in this world of time and trouble as dying men and women who live for eternity.

# Chapter 22

## The Temptation of Christ

Luke 4:1-13

“And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season” (Luke 4:1-13).

In order to save us from our sins the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of

God, not only became a man so that he could die for us as our Substitute; but he humbled himself as a man. I am certain that we cannot fathom the depths of his humiliation. And I am equally certain that we should not try. In fact, everything I have heard or read by men attempting to explain the various aspects of our Lord's humiliation, though done with the desire to honor him, has appeared to me to be a desecration of that which is most sacred.

Instead of trying to fathom the unfathomable, let us rather simply bow before the revelation of God in Holy Scripture and worship that One who, though he was rich, yet for our sake, became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.

In order to redeem and save his people, the Lord Jesus Christ had to live in perfect obedience to God, while enduring all the consequences of sin, triumph over Satan and suffer the wrath of God to the full satisfaction of justice, and thereby bring in everlasting righteousness as a man.

One great part of our Master's obedience was his temptation in all points as a man and his overcoming temptation, his triumphing over Satan in temptation, that he might be for us a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God. This is what we have before us in Luke 4:1-13.

## Real Temptation

Immediately after his baptism, Christ was harassed with the temptations of Satan. — *“He suffered being tempted;”* and he *“was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin”* (Hebrews 2:18 4:15). He was tried and tested with all sorts of temptations, just like we are. Yet, he had no sin and did no sin.

Satan tempted him, but not by stirring up some corruption, or provoking some lust in him, as he does when he tempts us to evil. David is an example of the way we are tempted. He was tempted, like we are, when Satan stirred up the lust of pride and vanity that was in him to number the people. But there was no sin, no corruption in Christ to be stirred. The old serpent found nothing in him with which to work.

Our Lord was not tempted by Satan putting any evil into him, as he put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray his Lord, and put it into the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira to lie unto the Holy Ghost.

And Satan got no advantage over the Lord Jesus by any of his temptations, as he so often does us. Oh, no! Our Savior triumphed over his adversary and ours in all things. The devil was forced to leave our Lord after these temptations in the wilderness, just as he was in the garden of Gethsemane. And, at last, our great Redeemer crushed the serpent's head in complete victory at Calvary, and bound the dragon of hell in the chain of his omnipotence, that he should deceive the nations no more.

Thank God, he who is our tempter, our adversary, our accuser, he who is far too cunning and powerful a foe for us has been bound by our Savior. Our adversary the devil still goes about, walking up and down in the earth as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. But he is a bound lion. His fangs and claws have been removed. In so far as God's elect are concerned, all he can do is roar (John 12:31-33; Revelation 12:10; 20:1-3).

Yet, we must never fail to remember that these temptations of Christ were real. Our Lord Jesus was tempted in all points, just like we are. The lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (1 John 2:16), by which he got advantage over Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and by which he still deceives and overthrows many, are the very weapons Satan used against our Master.

## Obedient, Yet Tempted

The Lord Jesus was tempted "*when he was full of the Holy Ghost*" (v. 1). Luke tells us that our Lord was filled with the Holy Spirit when he was tempted. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that he was led of the Spirit into the wilderness of temptation. These things are not written to fill up space. They are written for our learning. They tell us plainly that nothing shields a believer from Satan's temptations. Nothing will prevent us from temptation, but the will of God. Nothing we do can keep the

tempter away. No matter how fervent we are in prayer, no matter how completely we may walk in the Spirit, no matter how sensitive and submissive we are to the Spirit's leading, we will still be tempted of the devil to do evil.

In fact, Matthew specifically informs us that "*Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*" In other words, the temptations to which we are subjected are, like all other aspects of the believer's life, according to the will of God and designed by him for our good. Like our Master, God's people learn obedience by the things we suffer, even from the hands of our adversary the devil.

Our Lord's temptations came in the wilderness. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that the temptations took place in the wilderness, where there was no one and nothing to support him. Mark tells us that he was there exposed to the wild beasts. Matthew and Luke tell us that his temptations came after he had been miraculously sustained by God through a period of forty days and nights of fasting. This, too, is important. Our Master's temptations came at a time when he was physically weak and hungry. Satan is a cunning, crafty adversary. He suits his temptations to the constitution of our nature, the circumstances we are in and the situations in which we are found.

Our Savior was tempted just after his baptism. He had just come from a time of solemn worship and deliberate, consecrated obedience. He had just been baptized, in order to fulfill all righteousness (symbolically), as a pledge of his determination to obey his Father's will unto death as our Substitute. Our Lord had just been highly, publicly honored as the Son of God, in whom the Father is well pleased. He had just experienced the miraculous power of God in sustaining him in life without any natural means. He was sustained not by bread, but by the word (the decree) of God.

There is often only a step from great privileges and blessings to great trials and troubles. We must never forget this. Even in our most solemn frames and at the times of our greatest usefulness, we must "*watch and pray.*"

“So it often is with his members; that as he was tempted, after his baptism, after the Spirit of God had descended upon him, and filled him with his gifts and graces without measure; and after he had had such a testimony from heaven of his divine Sonship: so his people, after they have had communion with God in ordinances, and have had some sealing testimonies of his love, fall into temptations, and fall by them; as the disciples of Christ after the supper, who, when tempted, all forsook him and fled, and one denied him.” (John Gill)

### Three Great Evils

All that is in the world, all our troubles, all our trials, all our temptations, all our rebellions, all the misery we bring to others, and all the woe we bring upon ourselves are the result of three great evils, as John describes them: “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.*” These were, as I have already said, the ruin of Adam and Eve, and of our race in the Garden of Eden. And these are the areas wherein our Master was tempted of Satan. They have to do with unbelief, worldliness and presumption.

Three times we see our Savior tempted of the devil, assaulted by the fiend of hell, as he cunningly attempted, with feigned politeness, to draw the holy One of God into sin. Each assault was the work of one who is a master in deceit. We will be wise to carefully observe both the subtlety of the serpent and the wisdom of our Savior in each of these temptations.

### Lust of the Eye

*First*, Satan tempted the Lord Jesus to unbelief, to the lust of the eye.

“And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not

live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (vv. 3-4).

Here Satan tried to get the Lord Jesus to distrust his Father’s care, the care of him who had sustained him for forty days and nights without food. Our Savior was hungry and weak. But he had just received a public declaration, by which his Father owned him as the Son of God. So the hissing serpent offers him a very “kind, sensible” suggestion. The sense of it is this: — The devil picked up, or pointed to a rock and said, “Since you’re the Son of God, and you are hungry, why don’t you just turn this rock into a loaf of bread and have a bite to eat?”

Why should he wait? Why should the Creator of all things sit still and starve? Why not command the stone to become bread? What possible evil could there be in that? The answer is found in our Lord’s rely. Being familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, the Master resisted Satan and escaped his snare by quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3. — *“And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.”*

Our Lord refused to turn the stone to bread, because he refused to live by carnal reason. He refused to walk by sight. He was determined to live by faith, trusting the word<sup>8</sup> of God. He would not turn the stone into bread, because it was not his Father’s will that the stone be turned into bread.

Though our Lord performed countless miracles for the benefit of others, he never performed even one for his own benefit. He preferred to remain hungry than to violate his Father’s will. With the hunger pangs and physical weakness of going forty days and nights without food, the Lord Jesus in effect said to Satan, like Job of old, *“Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.”*

If we would honor God, we must follow Christ’s example.

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<sup>8</sup> The “word” of God, here and in the context of Deuteronomy, refers not to the Scriptures, but to the oracle, purpose and decree of God.

Let us ever choose trusting him, believing him, walking by faith, rather than leaning on the arm of the flesh. Our Father's will is always best; and he will provide everything we need as we walk in his will, in his way, trusting him.

There is another, obvious reason why he refused to turn the stone into bread. He was living on this earth as a man, as our Representative and Substitute, and you and I are not able to turn a rock into a loaf of bread. If he would live and die for us, as our Redeemer, he had to live and die as we must, as a man. If he would be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, he had to feel what we feel in the same circumstances.

I cannot help thinking that he may have had a third reason for refusing the devil, though he was terribly hungry. — He refused to make sport for and entertain the fiend of hell. He had nothing to prove to himself or to the devil. He was and is the Son of God. He knew it. His Father had just declared it. And, though pride would jump at the chance to prove it by displaying it before the prince of darkness, our Master refused to gratify him. But the heart of the matter is this. — Satan tried to get Christ not to trust his Father's wise and good providence. When Apollyon persuades us to walk by sight, by the lust of the eye, rather than trust God's providence, we have fallen victim to his devices.

## Lust of the Flesh

*Second*, Satan tried to entice the Holy One into sin by the lust of the flesh, by worldliness.<sup>9</sup> He tried to get the Lord Jesus to grasp worldly power by compromise.

“And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is

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9 This was actually the third temptation in the successive order given in Matthew 4; but for some reason not revealed to us the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to place this temptation second. Perhaps it was done just to give the goats a can to chew. Obviously, there is no significance to the fact.

delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (vv. 5-8).

The devil took the Lord Jesus by his permission up on top of one of those high mountains surrounding Jerusalem, and offered him all the kingdoms of the world, if he would just fall down and worship him.

Try to get a sense of the brazenness of the wicked one. He waved his hands, with a confident smile and, by a diabolical and false representation of things to the sight, he showed the Lord Jesus “*all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them,*” alluring him with a promise that the whole world would “*fall down and worship him.*” Imagine that!

For Satan to promise these to Christ was hellishly impertinent. The whole world was his already! The earth is his, and the fullness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein. He made it all. He owns it all. Besides that, all power in heaven and earth is given our Lord as the God-man Mediator, to rule them, use them and dispose of them as he will. For Satan to pretend that these were his to give, that they were in his power to dispose of to whomsoever he pleased, was intolerable arrogance.

Understand this. There is nothing in this world, nothing in the universe which belongs to Satan, nothing over which he has power, except as Christ our God gives it to him. This is the same devil who, we are told in the Book of Job, cowers before God’s throne to give account of his doings, who could not wiggle his finger against Job without God’s permission. Why he could not even go into a herd of hogs, without the Lord Jesus giving him permission to do so. For him to propose to Christ that he should fall down and worship him was the height of insolence and impudence! But that is his nature. We must never expect less from him or from those who dance by his lead.

“This shows what the original sin of the devil was, affectation of Deity, and to be worshipped as God; hence

he has usurped the title of the God of this world; and has prevailed upon the ignorant part of it, in some places, to give him worship: and, indeed, to sacrifice to idols, is to sacrifice to devils: but, not content with this, he sought to be worshipped by the Son of God himself; than which nothing could be more audacious and impious; wherefore Christ rejected his temptation with indignation and abhorrence; saying, *'Get thee behind me, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.'*”(John Gill)

The devil here appeals to the Master to by-pass the misery and agony of the cross. He was promised the world as the reward for his obedience unto death, the throne of universal monarchy, upon his finishing the Father's will as our sin-atonement Sacrifice. Satan was just offering him an easier way to get it all. All he required was what appears to be a small concession. He does not require that the Master cease to worship God, or to worship him above God, or even that he worship him permanently. He only demanded that he fall down and worship him, adore him, acknowledge him once and that in private.

The concession seemed to be small. The promise was great. The way was easy. Why shouldn't he take the easy way out? Why shouldn't he grab such an enormous prize? Why shouldn't we? The answer is found in our Master's quotation of Deuteronomy 6:13. We are to worship God alone and serve him alone. The glory of God must be our dominant concern. For that, for the glory of God, we ought to gladly sacrifice anything.

Let us ever beware of worldliness – the love of the world (1 John 2:15-17; Matthew 6:31-33). Beware of covetousness, which is idolatry (Luke 12:15). May God the Holy Spirit give us grace ever to set our affection on our Savior, not on this perishing world (Colossians 3:1-5).

## Pride of Life

*Third*, Satan tempted the Son of God with the pride of life, urging him to act in daring presumption.

“And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season” (vv. 9-13).

This time the devil quotes Scripture (Psalm 91:11). In fact, one of Satan’s favorite weapons is the Bible. He takes the Holy Book of Inspiration and twists it, perverts it, misuses it and abuses it for his own devices. Again, the Lord Jesus referred the devil to Deuteronomy 6. This time he quoted verse 16. — “*Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah.*”

What a wonderful, public, undeniable proof it would be that he is indeed the Son of God and the Messiah, and a clear fulfillment of Psalm 91, if the Lord Jesus would dive off that high, high wall of the temple, with all the scribes, and Pharisees, and people watching, as the angels of God swept down from heaven and gave him a gentle landing. After all, this was the promise of the Psalms. Surely, since God had not predestined his death at this time, he could not die by diving off the wall. Could he? For him to have heeded Satan’s allurements would have been an act of self exaltation and pride, as well as an act of complete irresponsibility, tempting God by presuming upon his goodness. Our Savior did not yield. The glory of his Father was more important to him than the fickle approval and applause of men. May the same ever be true of us!

The Lord Jesus Christ is just the Savior and Great High Priest we need. — “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but

was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16)

As he foiled Satan in the wilderness and crushed his head at Calvary, so he knows how to deliver you and me out of our temptations; and blessed be his name, he will! — “*And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.*”

# Chapter 23

## A Riot in the Synagogue

Luke 4:14-32

“And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph’s son? And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;

But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman *that was* a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way, And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power” (Luke 4:14-32).

When a small town boy grows up, goes out and makes a name for himself, and comes back home, all the old men extol him, the women admire him, and the children idolize him. He becomes the talk of the town. The local weekly, or bi-weekly newspaper runs a front page story about him, with huge pictures. The boy no one knew or gave much attention has become the town hero, and the town looks for a stage, so that they can show him off to the world. The poorer and more despised the town, the greater the hero.

That is just the picture we have before us in Luke 4:14. The Lord Jesus grew up in Nazareth. The common saying was, “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” But here was a home town boy, a native son who had proved everybody wrong, in so far as Nazareth was concerned. — “*Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all*” (vv. 14-15).

In a very brief time the Master’s doctrine and preaching had made him a very famous man. His miracles were talked about everywhere. Now he had come home.

## Public Worship

Though the Lord Jesus Christ was and is the Object of all true

worship, while he lived in this world as a man, as a child of God, our Master faithfully worshipped God in public and in private. Our Savior set before us an example to follow. In all things he is the pattern we are to copy.

“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written” (vv.16-17).

He needed none of the blessings we gain from divine worship. Yet, he was always faithful in public worship. He came to the house of God for the glory of God and for the benefit of others, not for himself. He forsook not the assembly of the saints. At all appointed times the Lord Jesus was found in the house of God, worshipping with the people of God. Luke tells us it was, “*his custom.*” May God the Holy Spirit teach us to follow his example (Matthew 18:20; Hebrews 10:23-26).

## Reading Scripture

One of the most blessed aspects of public worship is the reading of Holy Scripture. Even in their most degenerate times, the Jews retained and showed great reverence for the Word of God. Great emphasis was given to the reading of Holy Scripture.

It is a sad fact that most churches of our day place very little, if any, emphasis upon the public reading of the Word of God. That should not be. No part of the worship service is more important than the reading of the Word of God. When the Scriptures are read, we receive direct, verbally inspired instruction from God himself.

I have never conducted a public worship service without giving a special place to the reading of God’s Word, and I never intend to do so. I consider it to be as important as prayer, praise and preaching.

In the synagogue worship of the Jews a prominent place was

given to the reading of Holy Scripture every sabbath day (Luke 4:16; Acts 13:15). The apostle Paul told the young pastor, Timothy, to give attendance to reading the Scriptures, exhorting the saints and teaching the doctrine of the Gospel (1 Timothy 4:13). That is the way preachers are supposed to conduct the services of public worship. The epistles of the New Testament were written to be read in the churches, and our Lord's letters to the churches of Asia (Revelation 2-3) were to be read to the churches.

The importance of this practice cannot be overstressed. In every local church there are some who either cannot or do not read the Word of God for themselves, and some who read so poorly that they do not read correctly. Reason and common sense should teach us the usefulness of publicly reading the Scriptures to them. If men and women are to worship God, they must know what God says in his Word. God's Word alone, not the preacher's comments about it, is inspired and authoritative (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Therefore, prominence should be given to the reading of Holy Scripture in every assembly of the church. Hezekiah Harvey wrote...

“The omission of this would imply that the words of man are of higher moment than the words of God. The Scriptures should have a large and reverent use in the pulpit, as the fountain of all instruction and the sole standard of faith and practice.”

Primarily, it is the pastor's responsibility to read the Scriptures to the congregation. When he does, he may choose a passage relating to his message for the hour and give a brief exposition as he reads. But such expositions should always be carefully prepared, so that he does no violence to the text. Spontaneous, unprepared comments are seldom either accurate or helpful and display a terrible lack of reverence for the Word of God.

The pastor may ask one of the men of the church to read the Scriptures. If anyone is asked to do so, he must not take the work lightly, for he has the responsibility of reading God's Word to his people. The portion he chooses to read and the way he reads it

will set the tone for the entire worship service. He must seek the direction of God's Spirit with care. I make the following recommendations to anyone entrusted with this task.

- Select a devotional passage, a portion of Scripture that will lead the hearts of God's people to Christ. Select a brief passage. Generally, it is best to select just one passage. And always select a passage by which God has spoken to your own heart.
- Familiarize yourself with the passage you plan to read. Read it carefully, prayerfully and studiously at home. Read it several times, noting the punctuation of the text. Be certain that you understand the portion of Scripture you read to the church. If you do not understand it, select another portion to read.
- Read the passage carefully and distinctly. Remember you are not reading for yourself alone. You are reading to the congregation. Read loudly enough that everyone present can hear you distinctly! If you are not accustomed to reading in public, read the passage aloud at home. It is frustrating to try to follow a reading that cannot be heard.
- Read the Word of God without comment. Leave it to the preacher to do the preaching. When the Scriptures are read, it is so that God's people may hear God speak to their hearts by his Word.

## Isaiah's Prophecy

“The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (vv. 18-19).

The portion of Scripture our Savior read on this occasion was

Isaiah 61, one of the many passages describing the work of the Messiah and the salvation he would accomplish. Our Lord probably read the entire passage; but Luke simply refers to verses 1 and 2. This is what God declared the work of his Son would be, when he came to save his people from their sins. This is what Christ came to do. And this is what he has done and is doing.

“The spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are* bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn” (Isaiah 61:1-2).

Our Master was, as a man, a preacher anointed for the work by his Father and prepared for the work by the special gift of his Spirit. Preaching, true preaching requires these three things: (1.) the Spirit of God, (2.) the anointing of God and (3.) the message of God. But our Master was more than a preacher. He is our Savior. We preach what he did. He preached what he himself performed! He preached the gospel, glad tidings and good news, not good advice. Modern preaching is nothing but advice given to sinners, telling dead sinners what they must do. The Gospel of Christ is the proclamation of good news, telling poor sinners what Christ has done.

Our Savior preached the Gospel to the poor. Without question, he preached to multitudes who were materially poor; but the word here translated “*poor*” refers to “*the meek*,” those poor sinners who are broken before God, meek, knowing that they have nothing to offer the holy Lord God, and have no ability to produce anything he might accept from them. They are poor, meek, humbled and broken by the weight of sin and guilt before God’s glorious holiness.

The Lord Jesus Christ heals, binds up, the brokenhearted. He makes blind eyes to see, and gives comfort and liberty to bruised souls. The Son of God opens prison doors and sets the captive free. All this grace he pours out to sinners upon the basis of justice satisfied by blood atonement, proclaiming the acceptable

year of the LORD, the day God's righteous vengeance and justice was satisfied at Calvary.

## Scripture Fulfilled

“And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” (vv. 20-21).

Christ is the message of Holy Scripture! He was the fulfillment of this passage (Isaiah 61); and he was and is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament Scriptures. All the law, all the prophets, all the types, all the psalms, all the proverbs and all the history of the Old Testament speak about the Lord Jesus Christ and find their fulfillment in him.

“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

“And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:44-45).

This is not an invention or conclusion drawn from current theological understanding. The saints of God in ancient times knew that the Scriptures spoke of their coming Redeemer. It is a great mistake to underestimate the faith and knowledge of God's saints in the Old Testament. God's elect were saved in the Old Testament in exactly the same way we are saved today. God has only one way of saving sinners. That way, as you know, is Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. Christ was the Object of all true faith in the Old Testament, just as he is today.

What amount of knowledge those Old Testament believers

had, I cannot tell. It is not clearly revealed. But those earliest saints were not morons, either mentally or spiritually. We know that they understood and believed the gospel.

- Eve understood the promise that the Redeemer would be a man of the woman's seed (Genesis 3:15).
- Abel knew about blood atonement (Genesis 4).
- Abraham knew that the Redeemer would be God incarnate (Genesis 22:8).
- David clearly understood that forgiveness is sure through the blood atonement of a crucified Substitute (Psalms 22; 32, 51).
- Enoch even spoke plainly about the Lord's second advent (Jude 14).
- Even Job, in that which is probably the first book written in the Inspired Volume, describes Christ as our Redeemer and speaks of the resurrection at the last day (Job 19:25-27).
- Isaiah understood that the sinner's Substitute is both God and man in one person, whose work of redemption and grace must be effectual to the salvation of chosen sinners (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-9; 52:13-53:1-12).

Numerous other references could be given. These are truly only a few; and they were randomly selected. Yet, they will suffice to make my point irrefutable. **Old Testament saints knew and trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as their effectual, almighty, crucified, risen, reigning Savior.** It is also clear, to even a casual reader of Holy Scripture, that the saints of the Mosaic era clearly understood and rejoiced in the doctrines of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ.

- Divine Sovereignty (Psalms 115:3; 135:6; Daniel 4:35-37; Isaiah 46:9-11)
- Total Depravity (Psalms 14)
- Unconditional Election (Psalms 65:4; 2 Samuel 23:5)

- Limited Atonement (Isaiah 53:8-11)
- Irresistible Grace (Psalms 65:4; 110:3)
- Perseverance of the Saints (Psalms 23:6)

In a word, God gave faith to his chosen in the Old Testament, just as he gives us faith, by supernatural revelation, by revealing Christ to and in chosen sinners. Obviously, the Revelation of God in Scripture was not as full in Job's day as it was in Moses', or in Moses' day as it was in Malachi's, or in Malachi's day as it was in John the Baptist's, or in John the Baptist's day as it was in Paul's. But the Revelation was clear; and the faith of God's saints was exemplary (Hebrews 11).

I must personally acknowledge that I have never begun to experience the quality of faith that Noah exhibited in building the ark, Abraham exhibited on Mt. Moriah, or Moses exhibited in dealing with Pharaoh and Israel. Those men believed God. They knew, worshipped and trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the Scriptures of the Old Testament speak (John 5:39). The Book of God is all about the Son of God and the redemption he accomplished by his blood.

Everyone who heard the Lord Jesus preach was greatly impressed by his preaching. As we shall see, they were not impressed with what he preached, but with the way he preached it. What a danger! — *“And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?”* (v. 22) — *“Take heed therefore how ye hear”* (Luke 8:18). They heard with pleasure, but not with profit. They nodded their heads, but did not bow their hearts.

These fine, church going, Bible thumping, hymn singing folks were expecting the Son of God to entertain them with his wonders. Read verses 23 and 24.

“And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.”

In verses 25-27 the Lord Jesus declared to these proud Jews

that God almighty is always sovereign in the exercise of his mercy, love and grace. In other words, he said, *“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.”*

“But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, *a city* of Sidon, unto a woman *that was* a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.”

## Synagogue Riot

This message of divine sovereignty was too much for proud, self-righteous men and women to endure!

“And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong” (vv. 28-29).

What did our Master say to enrage these people so? He used no obscenities. He did not ridicule them, belittle them or call them names. All he did was assert that salvation is of the Lord, God is totally sovereign in the affair of salvation, God almighty is no man’s debtor and no one deserves God’s grace!

How did our Master react to the enraged mob? He just went right on about his business as the servant of God. He was not their servant, but God’s. What an example!

“But he passing through the midst of them went his way, and came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power” (vv. 30-32).

What was the cause of this rage? We must never forget that the Gospel we preach is a savor of life to some and of death to others. The Lord Jesus preached that doctrine which always has, always must and always will enrage carnal men, though the Son of God himself be the preacher. The sweet Gospel doctrine of divine sovereignty (Matthew 11:25-26; John 17:2-3, 9; Romans. 9:6-33) is odious and offensive to lost religionists, to men and women whose hearts are enmity against God. The sovereign God, particularly his sovereignty in the exercise of his saving mercy, stands in glaring opposition to the pride of will-worshipping man and his idolatrous freewill, works religion. The preaching of the Gospel always raises bitter resentment instantly among such rebels.

We must not look for or labor for the approval of men. — Labor with your eye toward eternity. There is a time to dig and a time to reap, a time to sow the seed and a time to gather the harvest, a time to tear down and a time to build. — God alone determines the time! Our business is to serve him, with persevering faithfulness. He requires nothing more and nothing less than faithfulness from his servants. Oh, may he graciously give us that faithfulness, for Christ's sake!

# Chapter 24

## Lessons from Capernaum

### Luke 4:31-44

“And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power. And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let *us* alone; what have we to do with thee, *thou* Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word *is* this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about. And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon’s house. And Simon’s wife’s mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them. Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking *them* suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ. And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place:

and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee” (Luke 4:31-44).

When the Jews at Nazareth threw him out of their synagogue and tried to murder him for preaching the gospel, our Lord came down to Capernaum, another Galilean city.

## Ordained Means

The first thing that stands out in this passage is the fact that gospel preaching is God’s ordained means of grace. This portion of Scripture begins and ends with statements about our Lord Jesus preaching the gospel.

“And (the Lord Jesus) came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power” (vv. 31-32).

“And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee” (vv. 43-44).

Our Savior placed great importance upon the preaching of the gospel. In fact, he said, “*I must preach the kingdom of God...for therefore am I sent.*” Preaching was his business.

I stress this fact because we live in a day in which preaching is belittled, set aside and considered out of date by the religious world. While I readily acknowledge that most preaching is irrelevant, gospel preaching is not. Rather, the preaching of the gospel is the most important aspect of the church’s life and ministry in every age.

Ever beware of those who make little of preaching, and of any tendency to set aside the ministry of the Word. The church is never stronger than her pulpit. The church is strong when the pulpit is strong. The church is irrelevant when the pulpit is

irrelevant. The preaching of the gospel is God's ordained means of grace to his people, the means by which he saves, edifies, comforts and directs his people in this world.

“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men...And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:9, 11-16)

Look at what Luke tells us about our Lord's preaching, in Luke 4:31-32, 43-44. Our Savior was a preacher of doctrine. His doctrine was astonishing. He preached “*the kingdom of God.*” His word fell upon the hearts of men with power. His every word was intentional, weighty, powerful. His gospel came “*in demonstration of the Spirit and power.*” Let every preacher seek wisdom and grace from God the Holy Spirit to imitate the Master.

## Demons

Another thing that stands out in this passage and needs to be understood is the fact that Satan, and hell, and demons are real.

“And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice,

Saying, Let *us* alone; what have we to do with thee, *thou* Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word *is* this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about” (vv:33-37).

I cannot say much about this, because I know little about it; but I want to be understood. Demonology is not something to play with or ignore. Hell is not a nightmare. It is real. Satan is not the boogie man, but the prince of darkness. Demons are not mythical monsters, but fallen angels. Satan, and hell, and the demons of hell are bent upon the destruction of our souls and the dishonor of our God.

I do not mean to suggest that these things are now, or ever can be, out of control. That is not the case. “*For this purpose,*” the Book tells us, “*Christ was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*” And he demonstrates his power over hell in this fourth chapter of Luke’s gospel. What does this passage tell us about the devil? — The devil is an unclean spirit. This unclean spirit works evil in the souls of men, just as he did in their bodies during the days of our Lord’s earthly ministry. — Those who are under Satan’s strongest influence are often found in the house of God. — The devils, the demons of hell have nothing to do with Christ (v. 34). — “*For, verily, he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.*”

The Lord Jesus Christ always has the devil under his control (vv. 35-36). When he says to hell, “*Hold thy peace,*” all hell holds its peace! With authority and power, he commands the unclean spirits.

## Knowledge and Salvation

Even the demons of hell have faith, doctrinally accurate faith, better faith than most Baptists (They believe and tremble!); but not saving faith. Beware of unsanctified knowledge. It is a dangerous snare by which many are destroyed. Knowledge is not salvation. Head knowledge, without heart experience, is a positive curse.

Spiritual knowledge, gospel knowledge, a saving knowledge of Christ is knowledge accompanied by faith, inspiring hope and producing love.

We must never be content with knowing Bible facts, Bible history, Bible “trivia,” or even Bible doctrine. Salvation is knowing God as he has revealed himself in the person and work of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:3).

Here are some questions worth considering: — Does my knowledge of sin make me hate it? — Does my knowledge of Christ cause me to trust him, love him and honor him? — Does my knowledge of God’s will cause me to seek, in all things, to obey it? — Does my knowledge of doctrine make me useful to others? — Does my knowledge of grace make me gracious? If the knowledge I have does not move my heart heavenward and does not make Christ precious to me, my knowledge is useless knowledge that will only add to my condemnation in hell.

## A Mighty Savior

Learn this and rejoice — The Lord Jesus Christ is a mighty Savior.

“And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon’s house. And Simon’s wife’s mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them. Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his

hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking *them* suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ. And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them” (vv. 38-42).

Demons and disease alike flee before the word of his power. By the touch of his hand the fever is removed and the fainting body is made strong. J. C. Ryle rightly observed...

“We see sicknesses and devils alike yielding to His command. He rebukes unclean spirits, and they come forth from the unhappy people whom they had possessed. He rebukes a fever, and lays his hands on sick people, and at once their diseases depart, and the sick are healed.

We cannot fail to observe many similar cases in the four Gospels. They occur so frequently that we are apt to read them with a thoughtless eye, and forget the mighty lesson which each one is meant to convey. They are all intended to fasten in our minds the great truth that Christ is the appointed Healer of every evil which sin has brought into the world. Christ is the true antidote and remedy for all the soul-ruining mischief which Satan has wrought on mankind. Christ is the universal physician to whom all the children of Adam must repair, if they would be made whole. In Him is life, and health, and liberty. This is the grand doctrine which every miracle of mercy in the Gospel is ordained and appointed to teach. Each is a plain witness to that mighty fact, which lies at the very foundation of the Gospel. The ability of Christ to supply to the uttermost every need of human nature is the very corner-stone of Christianity. Christ, in one word, is ‘all.’”

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Antidote for the old serpent’s poison. He is the remedy for our ruin. He is the Physician for our sin-sick souls. He is our Life, our Health and our Liberty. Our

Lord Jesus Christ is an able, almighty, omnipotent Savior. — *“He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them”* (Hebrews 7:25).

Our blessed Savior still enters the strong man’s house, binds him, casts him out, and takes possession of the house. It is still true that all upon whom he lays his hands, all to whom he speaks in saving power, are healed by him, immediately. And all who are healed by Christ gladly serve him and his people (v. 39).

When the day of grace dawns upon redeemed sinners, all who have known his saving power, tasted his grace and experienced his mercy, still lay hold of him, stay him, and plead with him ever to abide with them (v. 42). Spirit of God, cause us to “stay” him, that he may not depart from us!

# Chapter 25

## “Nevertheless, at Thy Word”

### Luke 5:1-11

“And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing *their* nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto *their* partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And so *was* also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him” (Luke 5:1-11).

In this portion of Holy Scripture the Holy Spirit gives us his

record of the call of our Lord's first three disciples. This is a more detailed account of their call to the work of the ministry than we have had before. May he by whom these words were inspired teach us the lessons they are intended to convey to us.

It is obvious that these eleven verses are intended to show us something of what is involved in believing and obeying the Lord Jesus Christ. We must both trust and obey the Son of God. Obedience does not save us or sanctify us; but where there is no obedience there is no salvation and no sanctification. Where faith comes, obedience follows.

### Pressed to Hear

Luke tells us that "*the people pressed upon*" the Lord Jesus "*to hear the Word of God.*" When they did, the Lord Jesus gave them their desire. Learn then that those who seek to hear the Word of God shall be taught of God.

"And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing *their* nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship" (vv. 1-3).

Here is a multitude of eternity bound men and women pressing upon the Savior "*to hear the Word of God*". What a blessed press! Like Mary, these men and women chose that one thing needful. They sat at Christ's feet to hear his word.

What Peter saw here, he later experienced in Caesarea, at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:33). Cornelius said to Peter, as he arrived to preach, — "*Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*"

Blessed are they who come to the house of God to hear the Word of God. They who come to be fed shall be fed. They who come to be taught shall be taught. They who come seeking

comfort shall find comfort. They who come seeking grace shall find grace. They who come seeking Christ shall find Christ. Hear what God himself says about this. — *“I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right”* (Isaiah 45:19).

## Human Instruments

In verse 4, we see how that our great and glorious Lord God condescends to use human instruments to perform his great and wondrous works. — *“Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.”*

The catching of this great draft of fish was miraculous; but the fishermen were just fishermen. The boats were just boats. The nets were just nets. — But they were fishermen, boats and nets, God was pleased to use.

There are many who object to this plain revelation of Scripture, fearing that it limits God and gives men a hand in God’s operations of grace. Moses did not part the Red Sea. God parted the sea using Moses’ rod. The disciples did not multiply the loaves and fish. The Lord Jesus did that; but he let those blessed men distribute food to the hungry. He who raised Lazarus from the dead could have easily moved the stone from the mouth of the tomb; but he chose to use men like you and me to roll away the stone from the mouth of the tomb. So, too, in the salvation of chosen, redeemed sinners, God condescends to work by means of human instruments. It is written, *“It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”*

The instruments God uses are themselves utterly useless and insufficient for their work; and they acknowledge that fact. — *“Master, we have toiled all night and have taken nothing.”* Why was this the case? Was it because there were no fish in the sea? No. Were they unskilled in their work? Certainly not. These were master seamen. Were they lacking in diligence? No. They had toiled all night. Why, then, had they caught nothing? Because we

must ever be reminded that the instruments themselves are worthless and useless. Our Savior said, "*Without me, ye can do nothing.*" But with him, we can do all things.

When the Son of God is at the helm of the boat, by some mysterious power, hordes of fish are drawn into the net.

The Lord usually performs his work in the most unlikely places. Our Master always chooses the most unlikely people as the objects of his grace, the most unlikely men to be his servants, and the most unlikely places to perform his works. He commanded the disciples to launch out into the deep. But, if you fish in lakes, you know that you are not likely to catch many fish in the deep waters.

## Faith and Obedience

Faith is obedient to Christ. — "And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net" (v. 5). Let men say what they will, God says, "Faith without works is dead;" and it is. Men may attempt, if they dare, to justify disobedience, but faith is obedient to the will and Word of God. Believers are not rebels, but willing servants.

The Master said, "*Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a great draught.*" This was a command which was manifestly contrary to reason and contrary to experience. These men had been fishing all night. But it was Christ the Lord who gave the command. And obedience to the Word and will of God requires immediate, unquestioning, selfless, self-denying compliance. — "*Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*"

"Trust and obey, trust and obey,  
For there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus,  
But to trust and obey."

## Christ our God

“And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto *their* partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken” (vv. 6-9).

There may be some things involved in Peter’s prayer which are not commendable. But I know this. What Peter here expressed is exactly what sinners feel when they see the glory of God in Christ. When sinners are made to see the goodness, grace, power, and glory of God in Christ, they are overwhelmed with their unworthiness to stand before his presence.

This miracle performed by our Savior caused Peter to be overwhelmed with a sense of the Savior’s Godhead. This is evident from the fact that he fell down at the Master’s feet, crying out, “*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*” He seems to have remembered, suddenly, what the Lord had said to Moses in the Mount. — “*Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live*” (Exodus 33:20). Thinking, as holy men did in ancient times, he concluded that the sight of God meant immediate death. That is clearly what Manoah thought, when the angel of the Lord (the pre-incarnate Christ) appeared to him and his wife and did wondrously. He said to his wife, “*We shall surely die, because we have seen God*” (Judges 13:22).

Suddenly remembering these things, Peter was overwhelmed with a conscious sense of sin and begged the Lord to depart from him. He was convinced that nothing short of omnipotent power could have produced such a miracle as he had seen. He was suddenly seized with a sense of the fact that he was in the immediate presence of God, the Almighty!

## Honor for Honor

God honors those who honor him. In his word of judgment to Eli concerning his sons the Lord God said, — "Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Samuel 2:30).

Nothing honors God like obedient faith. — "*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice*" (1 Samuel 15:22). When Peter launched out and let down his nets, he caught the fish; and faithfulness in small things always leads to greater things. So, we read in verse 10 that "*Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*" Peter, James, and John, who were faithful to Christ as fishermen, were made by Christ to be fishers (catchers) of men!

## Three Demands

Read Matthew 4:19 and Luke 5:11 together and you will see that the call of Christ demands and produces three things. — "*And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:19) — "*And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him*" (Luke 5:11).

When the Master calls sinners by his grace, and when he calls men saved by his grace into the work of the ministry, he requires three things from them, three things which only he can produce, but three things we must give.

1. **Faith** — If we would be the servants of God, if we would be men fishers, we must believe him!
2. **Forsaking** — If we would follow Christ, we must forsake all to do so.
3. **Following** — If we would be used of God, we must follow him: his will, his Word and his Spirit.

## **An Allegory**

This historic event, like all historic events recorded in Holy Scripture, has an allegorical meaning. The whole event is a remarkable picture and type of the history of God's church and its work in this world. The ships carrying Christ and his people across the sea with the Word of God represent gospel churches. The fishermen are representatives of gospel preachers and their work. The net cast is the gospel of the grace of God, which we preach to all men. The sea represents the world. The shore represents eternity. The miraculous draft of fish caught and brought to shore represents the success of our labors in compliance with the Master's Word, the salvation of God's elect.

# Chapter 26

## How does a sinner approach the Lord in order to obtain mercy?

### Luke 5:12-16

“And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on *his* face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And he put forth *his* hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed” (Luke 5:12-16).

Piecing together the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, it appears that this event took place just after our Lord had finished his Sermon on the Mount. — *“The people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”* When he came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed after him. And this one man full of leprosy made his way through the crowd. He came through the great mass of men, crying, *“Unclean, unclean.”* When he got to the Savior, he fell down at his feet and worshipped him, saying, *“Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”* *“And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean.”*

Here is an unclean leper seeking mercy from the hands of Christ; and he obtained the mercy he sought. The Lord made him whole.

When I read about this leper and the mercy he obtained from the Lord Jesus, I think to myself, “If one has been made whole, why not another? Does God forgive sin, then why not my sin? Does God justify the ungodly, then why not me? Does Christ receive sinners, then why not me? Is there mercy with the Lord for the guilty, then why not for me? Did Christ die for sinners, then why not for me? Does God save the unrighteous, then why not me?”

If we would obtain mercy, we must seek mercy like this poor leper, from the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let every saved sinner, as he reads again of God’s free, saving grace in Christ, remember and rejoice in what the Lord has done for him by his matchless, free and sovereign grace in Christ Jesus. Let every poor, lost soul, whose uncleanness before God causes him to crave the cleansing that Christ alone can give, look to the Son of God by faith.

## Deep Sense of Need

This poor wretch came to the Lord Jesus with a deep sense of his need. We do not read anything else in the Bible about the history of this man. We do not know who his parents were, where he was from, how old he was, or what became of him. He seems to be set before us for one reason only, and that is to show us how a sinner must come to the Lord Jesus, if he would obtain mercy. And the first thing is this: — If we would obtain mercy from Christ, we must come to him because we need him. No sinner will ever come to Christ in faith until God the Holy Spirit creates in him a sense of his need. No one seeks mercy until he needs mercy.

You are familiar with what leprosy is and what it represents. Leprosy was a loathsome disease, common during the days of our Lord’s earthly ministry. It was a disease so peculiar that it was always considered a mark of divine displeasure on those who were afflicted with it (Numbers 12:10; 2 Kings 5:27; 2

Chronicles 26:19). Because they were ceremonially unclean, lepers were not allowed to walk in the company of others, or come into the house of God.

Leprosy fitly represents the plague of sin with which sons of Adam are diseased. It is to the body what sin is to the soul. W. M. Thomson, in his famous work, "The Land and the Book," describes lepers in Israel as follows.

"The hair falls from the head and eyebrows. The nails loosen, decay and drop off. Joint after joint of the fingers and toes shrink up and slowly fall away. The gums are absorbed and the teeth disappear. The nose, the eyes, the tongue, and the palate are slowly consumed."

The leper was a loathsome, miserable, outcast creature. He was walking death. Leprosy, like sin, was a loathsome, unclean disease. Leprosy, like sin, was (by human means) an incurable disease. Leprosy, like sin, was a consuming disease. Leprosy, like sin, was the sure forerunner of death.

The man here held before us by the Spirit of God had a keen sense of his desperate need. Here is a man whose body was covered from head to toe with leprosy. His disease was always before him. There was no hiding it. His body was covered with ulcers oozing with a liquid of sickening smell. His body was racked with pain. Luke tells us that he was "*full of leprosy.*" He knew that he needed help. He needed supernatural, merciful, divine help. He needed the help of God. Without it, he would surely die.

This is the very reason men and women do not come to Christ. — They do not have any sense of need. They do not know their need of Christ. But when the plague of sin in a man's heart causes his very soul to burn with fever, when the sinner knows he is lost, helpless, unclean and doomed, that without Christ he must surely die, he seeks him.

## Christ the Healer

Christ alone has power to heal our souls. The cleansing from

leprosy was portrayed in the ceremonial law (Leviticus 14); but it is the gospel that reveals the cure. The cleansing of grace is found only in Christ (Ezekiel 36:25; 1 John 7-9). His blood alone can cleanse the leprous soul. His mercy alone can save. Christ alone can make the unclean clean and righteous before God.

Those who know their need of mercy will soon obtain mercy.

“All the fitness he requireth  
Is to feel your need of Him.”

And it is the work of God the Holy Spirit that makes us know our need of Christ. Robert Hawker wrote, “This poor creature, which came to Jesus, is the representative of every poor sinner, when convinced of the leprosy of sin, from the teaching of God the Holy Ghost. Such an one is convinced of Christ’s ability, because God the Spirit hath taught him who Christ is, and what Christ is able to perform.” Joseph Hart gives us the same thing in one of his great hymn...

“What comfort can a Savior bring  
To those who never felt their woe?  
A sinner is a sacred thing;  
The Holy Ghost hath made him so.  
New life from Him we must receive,  
Before for sin we rightly grieve.

This faithful saying let us own,  
Well worthy ‘tis to be believed,  
That Christ into the world came down,  
That sinners might by Him be saved.  
Sinners are high in His esteem.”

## Utter Humiliation

This leper came to the Lord Jesus in utter humiliation. Matthew tells us he came “*worshipping*.” Luke says that, “*Seeing Jesus, he fell on his face*.” Mark tells us that he came “*kneeling*.” That is just the way sinners must come to the Savior, kneeling and falling on their face at his feet, worshipping! The sinner must come

down, down from his pride, down from his self-righteousness, down from his self-sufficiency! He must come down in his own eyes, down, down, down, all the way down to the feet of Christ (Luke 18:9-14).

If ever we see who and what we are, we will come down. You and I are poor sons and daughters of Adam, full of uncleanness, cursed, condemned and ready to die. We are utterly helpless and completely unworthy of God's slightest notice.

If ever we see who Christ is and what he is, we will come down. He is holy, righteous and true. He is a God full of mercy, love and grace. He is a God able and willing to save. He is a Fountain opened for cleansing. He is God, whose glory it is to forgive sin.

And God knows how to bring sinners down to the feet of his Son. Psalm 107 is a song of praise to God for his wondrous work of providence, by which he brings chosen sinners down. But providence alone will not cause sinners to seek the Lord. God brings sinners down by causing his holy law to enter their hearts, exposing their sin, pronouncing their uncleanness and declaring their guilt (Romans 7:9). And God brings sinners down by the gospel, by revealing Christ to them and in them (Zechariah 12:10; Galatians 1:15-16).

Do you feel your desperate need of Christ? Has your heart been broken and humbled at the feet of Christ? Are you sweetly compelled, like Job, to cry, *"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes"* (Job 42:5-6)?

## Great and Weak Faith

This poor leper came to the Lord Jesus in very weak faith, but faith that obtained great grace; and that makes the weakest faith great faith (Hebrews 11:6). I do not know how he came to have faith in Christ. Perhaps he had heard our Lord preach. Perhaps he was familiar with the Old Testament prophets. Perhaps he had heard the fame of our Lord from others. But this much is certain:

— He knew who Christ was. He believed his claims. And he came to the Savior in faith, because God the Holy Spirit had given him faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8; Colossians 1:12).

The leper came to the Lord by himself. Others had been led to Christ by one of his disciples, but not this man. Others were picked up and brought to the Lord, but not the leper. Others, who could not come and were not brought, were blessed by a visit from the Lord himself, but not this leper. Everyone had given this poor man up as a hopeless case. He was a lonely, isolated man. No man cared for his soul. No one could or would take him to the Savior. But it is our Lord's delight to save the hopeless, the helpless and the friendless.

This leper came to the Lord Jesus against many obstacles. He had no precedent to follow. No leper had come to the Savior before him. He had no promise of cure. He was not invited to come. And he had no legal right to come. Yet, the leper came to Christ confessing faith in him. He worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ as God. It appears that he believed him to be the very God by whom others like him were healed in days of old. He bowed to and worshipped Christ as his Lord. He knew the Christ had it in his power to make him clean and whole. And he confessed his faith in Christ in his own words. He did not merely repeat a prayer someone else told him to say!

In all those things this man's faith appears to be great and remarkable. Truly, it was. Yet, he displayed a great weakness of faith. Though he had no doubt that the Lord Jesus was able to heal him, he doubted whether he would heal him. He said, to the Lord Jesus, "*If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*"

All God's children in this world know by experience what it is to come to the Lord Jesus with such weakness of faith. Where is the saved sinner who has not come to the throne of grace, seeking mercy and grace in time of need, while very greatly in doubt that God would give the mercy and grace needed? God forgive our unbelief!

It was in just such weakness of faith that this poor leper came to the Savior. But such is the greatness of our Savior's grace,

such is the character of our God “*who delighteth in mercy,*” that the weakness of our faith does not restrain his arm of grace! The Lord Jesus was moved with compassion toward this poor soul (Mark 1:41). “*And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean*” (v. 13).

## Total Submission

This leper came to the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing his need of him, in great humiliation and in faith. And he came to the Savior in total submission. He recognized that the whole issue was in the hands of Christ. He cried, “*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*”

He understood what few understand. Grace is God’s prerogative alone. Salvation depends entirely upon the will of the Lord our God, who has mercy on whom he will have mercy. Christ alone has the right to save and the power to save; and the whole matter of salvation is according to his own sovereign will (Romans 9:16, 18). Recognizing the sovereignty of Christ’s power and the sovereignty of his will, the leper submitted to the Lord with joyful hope. He simply threw himself upon Christ. And we must do the same. — “Lord, if you will, you can save me.”

Yet, he had hope. The Lord had never refused such a request before. And there is hope for us. God never has yet turned away one seeking, believing, submissive sinner. It seems likely, therefore, that he will not turn any away now.

“Perhaps He will admit my plea,  
Perhaps will hear my prayer;  
But if I perish, I will pray,  
And perish only there.

I can but perish if I go,  
I am resolved to try;  
For if I stay away I know,  
I must forever die.

But if I die with mercy sought,

When I the King have tried;  
This were to die (delightful thought!)  
As sinner never died.”

The leper could not be worse off, even if he had been rejected. And if it were to happen that you sued for mercy or obtained it not, what would be your loss?

## Mercy Obtained

But that was not the case. This poor leper obtained the mercy he desperately needed. — “*He put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean.*” The Lord Jesus was moved with compassion toward him. And being moved with compassion toward him, he healed him immediately and completely.

Yet, there is more. The Lord Jesus healed this poor leper by touching him. Imagine that! Infinite, spotless purity reached down and touched utter corruption! The spotless Lamb of God took into union with himself our nature. He became one of us that he might save us poor, leprous sinners from our sin and make us clean by the sacrifice of himself. Upon the cursed tree, our Lord Jesus Christ was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He who is altogether holy and pure, clean and righteous was made unclean before his own holy law, just as the priest who burned the red heifer with her dung was made unclean by the sacrifice required in Numbers 19:7. The Lord Jesus was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He died for his elect, the just for the unjust, because there was no other way he could make us just!

## An Important Lesson

When we read verses 14 and 15, we will find a very important lesson taught by our Master.

“And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But so

much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities” (vv. 14-15).

This cured leper’s disobedience to the Savior’s express command is here recorded by divine inspiration for a reason. The Holy Spirit is here showing us that there is a time to be silent about the things of God, as well as a time to speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7). Our Savior says, “*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you*” (Matthew 7:6).

I realize that this is a matter to be dealt with carefully; but sometimes we serve the cause of Christ better by silence than by speech. It is best for us to be silent when the cause of Christ cannot be served by us speaking. We do not serve the cause of Christ by trying to cram our doctrine down the throats of those who oppose it. It is best to leave such people alone, until God opens the door to minister to them. It is best for us to be silent when those around us have no interest in hearing the good news of God’s grace. It is best for us to be silent when those around us only quibble and scoff at the things of God. And it is certainly best for us to be silent when we are supposed to be doing something else. It is a rare thing for an employer to pay a man wages to teach others the things of God.

No doubt, this man was sincere, and blazed the matter abroad, because he wanted all around him to know what great grace he had experienced. But the result was “*that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city.*” There is a zeal which is “*not according to knowledge.*” Such zeal causes much harm. I would not attempt to prescribe to any when he should be silent and when he should “*blaze abroad*” the things of God. Yet, I do know that there are times when we serve our Savior and the interests of his kingdom far more effectively in silence than in other ways. Commenting on this passage, J. C. Ryle cautions...

“The subject is a delicate and difficult one, without doubt. Unquestionably the majority of Christians are far more inclined to be silent about their glorious Master than to confess Him before men — and do not need the bridle so

much as the spur. But still it is undeniable that there is a time for all things; and to know the time should be one great aim of a Christian. There are good men who have more zeal than discretion, and even help the enemy of truth by unseasonable acts and words.”

May God give us the Spirit of wisdom, that we may serve and not hinder his cause in this world, that we may serve our Savior with good sense. We must never be fearful to confess Christ before Pharaoh, as Moses did, or before Herod, as John the Baptist did. Yet, we must not cast the pearls of his grace before swine to be trampled beneath their feet with contempt.

Still, there is more. Not only did the Savior command this healed leper to “*tell no man,*” he also said, “*but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*” He told him to go and show himself to the priest, specifically “*for a testimony unto them.*” He was told to go to the priest, so that the priest would pronounce him clean, as a testimony to the priests, either a convincing testimony to them that the Lord Jesus was the Son of God and true Messiah, or a standing testimony against them forever.

Certainly there is still more in this command. For all grace and mercy we should, first and foremost, show ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest and Almighty Savior, the Author and Giver of all. He is to be eyed and acknowledged first in all things. In all things let us live before him and unto him, not before men and unto men. As Paul puts it, “*Do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ*” (Galatians 1:10).

# Chapter 27

## Four of the Most Important Men in the Bible

Luke 5:17-26

“And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them. And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought *means* to bring him in, and to lay *him* before him. And when they could not find by what *way* they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with *his* couch into the midst before Jesus. And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange

things to day” (Luke 5:17-26).

We have before us four of the most important men in the Bible. So far as I know, not one of them was a preacher. None of them wrote a word of inspiration. These four men were not prophets or apostles. They appear to have been insignificant, if not totally unknown among their peers. The names, ages and birth places of these four men are not mentioned anywhere in the Word of God. Yet, these four men rank among the most important men in the Bible, because these four, unknown nobodies were instruments by which God brought one of his elect sheep to Christ. These four men had a friend who was paralyzed, both physically and spiritually; and they brought their friend to Christ; and the Lord Jesus both healed their friend and forgave his sin. The story of their remarkable faith and zeal is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Never in all the world did any mortals perform a more important work than these four men. Because of their labors, a sinner was saved and God was glorified.

Try to get a picture in your mind of the scene before us in Luke 5:17-26. It is a very remarkable story. These four men knew who Christ is and they knew the power of his grace. They knew a man who needed their Savior. They knew where the Lord Jesus was to be found. They resolved together to bring their friend to the Savior. And by thoughtful planning, labor and perseverance, these four men succeeded in getting their friend to Christ.

The work required much time and effort; but they were in dead earnest. They knew that Christ had the power to save their friend; and they knew that their friend needed his grace. They were determined to let nothing stand in their way. They were determined to get their friend to Christ. They could not heal his disease. They could not save his soul. They could not forgive his sin. And they did not know whether or not the Lord would do these things for him. But they could get their friend to Christ. And what they could do they were determined to do. And as a direct result of their diligent labors, a sinner was saved and God was glorified. Nothing in all the world could be more important. When the Lord Jesus saw their faith, he forgave that man’s sin.

God the Holy Spirit holds these four men up before our eyes

as examples for us to follow. They show us the importance and the necessity of personal evangelism.

## Five Facts

We know that “*salvation is of the Lord.*” No man can save himself; and we cannot save other men. It is not possible for us to create a new heart in another person. We cannot give them repentance and faith in Christ. We cannot reveal Christ to a man’s heart. But there are some things that we can do. And what we can do, we must do. — Here are five facts plainly revealed in the Word of God.

1. All men by nature are totally depraved, helplessly lost and spiritually dead. No man will ever, of his own accord, by his own free-will, seek the Lord and come to Christ (Romans 3:10-12).
2. God has an elect people in this world whom he has chosen for himself in eternal love and determined to save (Romans 8:29-30).
3. The Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed those chosen of God by his own precious blood; and, by the merit and efficacy of his blood, he shall bring them into the bliss and glory of eternal life in heaven (Isaiah 53:9-11).
4. God the Holy Spirit shall effectually quicken, regenerate and preserve all of those who were chosen by God the Father and redeemed by God the Son, calling them to faith in Christ by irresistible grace (Psalms 65:4; 110:3).
5. And God uses men to reach the hearts of men with the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:21).

As he used the Hebrew maid to convince Naaman, used Andrew to find Peter, used the Samaritan woman to call his elect in Samaria, and used Philip to call the Ethiopian Eunuch, so the Lord God still uses saved sinners in his mighty operations of grace by which he saves chosen sinners.

It is God’s good pleasure to use sinful men to proclaim the

gospel to sinful men. He could use angels. He could speak to men directly. But he has chosen to speak to men through us. What a privilege he has given us (2 Corinthians 4:7). This is no limitation to God's sovereignty. It is the marvel of his sovereign grace that he is pleased to use us (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

## Five Questions

I pray that God the Holy Spirit will kindle a fire in our hearts and inspire us to zealously give ourselves to the business of bringing sinners to Christ.<sup>10</sup>

### 1. Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel of his grace?

I am not asking whether or not you are a religious person. I am not asking about your doctrinal beliefs, your denominational affiliation, or your works of morality. I am asking this one thing: — Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? Has he been revealed in your heart? Have you seen his face, heard his voice and followed him? If you are truly united to Christ by faith, if you do love him, surely you want others to know him (Romans 10:1).

Do you know the gospel of the grace of God? Do you know how it is that God saves sinners by the substitutionary sacrifice of his own dear Son? (John 3:14-16; Romans 3:24-26).

The universal testimony of Holy Scripture is, "*By grace ye are saved!*" Salvation is by grace, because sinners need grace (Ephesians 2:1-4). Totally depraved, spiritually dead sinners must be saved by grace, because they are totally incapable of saving themselves, or of assisting in the salvation of their souls. Salvation by grace excludes all boasting on the part of man (Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Corinthians 4:7). — "*It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.*"

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<sup>10</sup> The reader will find detailed studies on this event in my expositions of Matthew 9 and Mark 2.

Salvation by grace gives all the praise, honor and glory to the triune God for what he has done (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14): to God the Father for election and predestination, to God the Son for redemption and forgiveness, to God the Holy Spirit for regeneration and preservation. Salvation by grace is a door of hope for helpless, guilty sinners. If God required us to do something to be saved, none would ever be saved. But, since the whole of salvation is by grace, there is hope for sinners who are incapable of doing anything to please God. Salvation by grace is salvation from sin (Matthew 1:21). Grace saves us from both the penalty of sin and the dominion of sin. Grace is not a license to sin. Grace never justifies a life of sin. Grace makes sinners the servants of righteousness. But how does grace save?

Grace does not save us by overlooking our sins and pretending that they do not exist (Ezekiel 18:20), by enabling us to keep the law of God (Galatians 3:21), or by giving us religious ceremonies to observe (Galatians 5:2) and good works to perform (2 Timothy 1:9).

Grace saves by substitution, by transferring the sins of God's elect to Christ and punishing him for them as our Substitute (Romans 3:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 2:24). Substitutionary redemption upholds and satisfies the justice of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ was made sin for his people so that our sins might be justly imputed and charged to him. When he was made sin for us, the Lord God poured out on him all the fury of his holy law and offended justice. Because he exhausted his wrath on our Substitute, the Lord Jesus, the Lord God declares, to all for whom Christ died, "*Fury is not in me*" (Isaiah 27:4). He is to every believing sinner both "*a just God and a Savior*" (Isaiah 45:20-22).

Grace saves us by making us the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21), by imputing Christ's righteousness to us and by making us "*partakers of the divine nature*" (2 Peter 1:4) in regeneration, giving us life and faith in Christ (Colossians 2:12). Grace saves by making Christ and his sin-atonement death precious to our hearts. The death of Christ is of absolutely no benefit to any sinner until he believes the gospel. — "*Christ in*

*you (is) the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27). — “*He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned*” (John 3:18).

Grace saves us by keeping and preserving us unto eternal glory (1 Peter 1:5). “*The gifts and callings of God are without repentance*” (Romans 11:29). That which grace begins, grace will complete (Philippians 1:6). Grace will not be frustrated. Grace can never fail!

If you know Christ, you ought to confess him. If you know the gospel, you ought to tell it. The Savior says, “Ye are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:48; Acts 5:32; 10:39; 2 Timothy 2:2).

## 2. Do you know any place where sinners are sure to hear the gospel, any place where Christ is preached?

Do you know of a place where the power of God is present to heal the souls of men? Every gospel church is such a place. The church of Christ is to be a sounding board for the gospel. Our one purpose for existence in this world, our one business in life is to preach the gospel of Christ.

Every pastor, every gospel preacher is responsible to make it his business, every time he speaks to eternity bound sinners in God’s name, to preach the gospel to them (1 Corinthians 2:2; 9:16). The preacher must have but one real ambition in life; and that one ambition must be to hold Christ up and point men and women to him, saying, “*Behold the Lamb of God.*” He alone is the Substitute for sinners. He alone is the Savior of men. There is hope for sinners in him. There is redemption in him. There is righteousness in him. There is life in him. There is salvation in him. There is safety in him.

The preaching of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18, 24; 2:2-5). Bring sinners with you to the place where “*the power of the Lord is present to heal them.*” In that place where God speaks to your heart and reveals Christ to you, he may do the same for others.

### 3. Do you have any real love and concern for the glory of God and the souls of men?

Do you know anyone who needs healing? I know this: — That about which we are truly concerned, that which is really important to us is that about which we will be diligent and earnest. J.C. Ryle wrote...

“Why is it that so many people take no pains in religion? How is it that they can never find time for praying, Bible reading, and hearing the gospel? What is the secret of their continual string of excuses for neglecting the means of grace? How is it that the very same men who are full of zeal about money, business, pleasure or politics, will take no trouble about their souls? The answer to these questions is short and simple. These men are not in earnest about salvation.”

If the glory of Christ is important to you, the worship of Christ will be important to you. If the souls of your children are important to you, you will see to it that they hear the gospel. If the souls of men are important to you, you will do what you can to see to it that they hear the gospel.

Do you not know that this world is passing away? Do you not know that men are perishing? Do you not know that hell is real, heaven is real, eternal death is real, eternal life is real?

### 4. What can we do to bring sinners to Christ?

We cannot all become preachers and missionaries. We cannot all be Bible teachers. And I do not suggest that we all should be preachers, missionaries and teachers. But there are some things that you and I can and should do for the glory of God and the salvation of his elect.

We can adorn the gospel of the grace of God by our daily lives (Titus 2:10). Let us seek grace to live in accordance with what we profess, or it will be of no value to anyone for us to try to be witnesses of the gospel. See to it that your profession and

your practice are in agreement.

We can all tell what we know. We do not have to be theologians to be faithful witnesses. A faithful witness is one who simply tells what he knows to be true. Do you know that Christ is precious? Tell it. Do you know that God forgives sin? Tell it. Do you know that salvation is by grace through faith? Tell it. Make it your business to talk to people about Christ and the gospel.

We can all distribute gospel literature to our friends and neighbors. We can all bring people with us to hear the gospel. We can give of our means for the furtherance of the gospel. We can all greet people who attend the house of worship with warmth and friendliness. We can all earnestly pray for the conversion of sinners.

## **5. Why should we all diligently give ourselves to this work?**

I have been very plain and pointed in stating things we can and should do for the furtherance of the gospel and the conversion of sinners. May God the Holy Spirit give us grace to take these things to heart. We all have a terrible tendency to become slothful and negligent in the matter of witnessing to men. Let me make one last effort to stir our hearts and inspire our souls with zeal in this matter.

We should be faithful witnesses of the gospel, because men and women are perishing in unbelief and sin. Our Lord has commanded us to be his witnesses. The love of Christ constrains us to proclaim the good news of salvation and grace to others. This is the means which God has ordained for the conversion of sinners. And the work of evangelism is a glorious, soul-cheering work (James 5:20). Above all, let us give ourselves to this work for the glory of God. Nothing more glorifies God than the salvation of his elect.

So, let us dedicate ourselves to the glory of God. Let us be faithful in all that concerns the gospel of Christ. Let us give ourselves to the work of evangelism. Make it your business to be

a faithful witness for Christ. Become Christ's ambassador to your family. Be the Lord's missionary in your community.

# Chapter 28

## “A Publican Named Levi”

Luke 5:27-32

“And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:27-32).

We have before us the story of an immortal soul, a man who had managed to amass a considerable measure of wealth, wealth gained (in all likelihood) by oppression, but wealth nonetheless. Yet, this man was empty inside. He was troubled in his soul. His wealth could not buy him peace, or silence his conscience. Though he did not know it, this man was a chosen object of grace, an appointed vessel of mercy, for whom the time of love had come. Here we see him visited by the Son of God and called by his irresistible power and grace.

This is a story which ought to be of great interest to all who know the value of their immortal souls and desire God’s salvation. These verses describe the conversion of Levi (Matthew), one of Christ’s first disciples.

Like Levi, you and I were born in sin. Like him, we lived according to the course of this world, walked after the lusts of our

flesh, and were by nature the children of wrath. — *“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great loved wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sin, hath quickened us together with Christ.”*

Had he not come to us, we would never have come to him. Had he not called us, we would never have called upon him. Had he not turned us, we would never have been turned. Had he not converted us by his almighty grace, we would never have been converted.

Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that we must be converted, or we must perish forever in hell. This conversion is God’s work. It is the turning of our souls to God. Conversion is accomplished by God the Holy Spirit turning sinners to the Savior. He turns chosen, redeemed sinners from unbelief to faith, from rebellion to surrender, from enmity to love, from sin to righteousness, from self-righteousness to Christ. Have you been converted? Are we being converted? Is God working in us, turning us to himself? If we have been converted, we are being converted. This work of grace is not over until it is finished. Believing sinners continually cry unto the Lord for converting grace (Psalm 85:10; Jeremiah 31:18-19; Lamentations 5:21).

Let’s see what God the Holy Spirit teaches us about conversion in the story of Levi’s conversion, as it preserved for us by divine inspiration here in Luke’s Gospel. May he give us grace to honestly compare our own experience to Levi’s. If we are converted, the changes which were wrought in him by the grace and power of God have also been wrought in us.

### **Levi's Conversion**

“And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him” (vv. 27-28). — Here we see the power of Christ’s grace in effectual calling. Here was a publican called by the Son of God. As soon as he was called, he willingly left all and followed Christ.

Levi is called Matthew, which means “gift of God,” throughout the New Testament, because he was given by God the Father to the Son. He was given to Christ in the covenant of grace before the world began. He is now given to Christ in saving grace (John 6:37-45). And here the Holy Spirit tells us how he received that salvation, which is the gift of God.

Levi was a publican, a tax-collector. He was thoroughly absorbed with his good career. He thought of nothing but money, how to get it, how to spend it, and how to get more. He was not seeking the Lord. He appears not even to have any consciousness of need in his soul. There were no preparations that preceded the Savior’s call. Levi did not first experience deep feelings of guilt, experience a great time of mourning and repentance, or even acquire great knowledge. The Savior called; and, as the result of the Savior’s call, Levi followed him. What grace there is here, surprising, omnipotent, free grace! He who said, “*I am found of them that sought me not*” (Isaiah 65:1), found Levi, and graciously caused Levi to find him by the effectual, distinguishing call of his omnipotent mercy.

Can you imagine how utterly surprised Levi must have been on that day when grace overtook and conquered him? The fact is, — God’s saving grace is always surprising in the experience of it. Here is the blessed, sovereign intervention of grace. The Lord Jesus passed by. He saw Levi; and he called him. That is the way he works yet today.

Here is the blessed choice and decision of faith. — “*He left all, rose up, and followed him.*” Because he followed Christ, this worthless, useless, hated man became a useful man of indescribable benefit to the souls of men. Effectual grace always produces effects in the lives of saved sinners. Levi (Matthew) wrote one of the four inspired gospel narratives known the world over. He became a blessing to millions. He left a name never to be forgotten. He was a man used of God for much good to many. As soon as the Savior called, he obeyed. No sooner did the Lord Jesus open his heart to receive him than Levi opened his house to the Savior; and this publican, who obtained mercy from the Lord, invited other publicans to come and find mercy also. Christ is all;

and there is enough in Christ for all.

We should never despair of any. Had we seen this man in this situation, I do not doubt that most, if not all, who read these lines would have said, "There is a man consumed with the world." and passed on, presuming that he would never come to Christ. May God the Holy Spirit keep us from such arrogant folly. None are too wicked, too hardened, too worldly, too lost to be saved by Christ. No sins are too bad, too vile, too many to be forgiven. No heart is so dead, so corrupt, so consumed with the world that it cannot be conquered by the Lion of the tribe of Judah. None are beyond the reach of God's saving arm. — "*With God nothing is impossible!*"

Are you converted? Has the Lord snatched you from destruction, lifted you from the pit of corruption, raised you from the dead? Have you "*left all and followed*" Christ? I urge you now to come to Christ. He who called Levi is still calling sinners. There is atonement still in Christ's precious blood. There is righteousness still in the Son of God. There is yet forgiveness with God. The Son of God still clothes naked, needy sinners with the garments of salvation.

### Levi's Celebration

"And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them" (v. 29). — This was a feast for laughter and celebration (Ecclesiastes 10:19). Levi regarded his conversion as a matter of great joy. He wanted others to rejoice with him in what he had experienced; and he wanted others to know the grace he knew, the Christ he knew, the God he knew. No doubt, many of his friends looked upon his conversion as a thing to be pitied; but Levi knew he had reason to celebrate!

There is not a higher day, a day more to be celebrated, a day more to be remembered than the day of grace. Graduation, marriage, the birth of a child, all pale compared to this. When God saves a sinner, when a lost soul is converted to Christ, it is the birth of a soul, the rescue of a sinner, the pardon of a

condemned prisoner, the opening of the prison doors, the coronation of a king, the making of a priest, the adoption of a son, the forgiveness of all sin, the bestowing of righteousness and the acceptance of a sinner.

## Levi's Concern

This sinner, converted and saved by the grace of God, was concerned for the souls of others. He wanted others to be converted and saved by grace. So when he made his party, he invited a great company of publicans and sinners to come. He knew what their souls needed and did what he could to meet the need. J. C. Ryle rightly observed...

“It may be safely asserted that there is no grace in the man who cares nothing about the salvation of his fellow men. The heart which is really taught by the Holy Spirit will always be full of love, charity, and compassion. The soul which has been truly called of God will earnestly desire that others may experience the same calling.”

He went to great expense and trouble to get his lost friends in the company and presence of Christ the Savior. Saved sinners are never content to go to heaven alone. The expense of providing such a large, lavish feast for a huge number of guests (as the word “*feast*” implies) was great. It appears that Levi considered no cost too great to get sinners in the company of the Savior. May God give us each the grace to use our place, our property and our possessions for the everlasting benefit of immortal souls. Having received mercy, we ought to make it our business to show others the mercy, love and grace of God in Christ.

Perhaps, you think, “What can I do?” Do what you can to bring Christ to sinners and sinners to Christ. As Moses said to Hobab, you can say to others, “*Come thou with us, and we will do thee good*” (Numbers 10:29). As the Samaritan woman said to the men of the city, you can say to those around you, “*Come see a man who told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?*” You can say to your family what Andrew said to his brother, Peter, “*We have found the Christ.*”

## Levi's Critics

*“But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?”* (v. 30). — They are hardly worth mentioning, but since they are barely mentioned by Luke, I will barely mention them, too. If you seek to walk with God and serve the souls of men, you will have plenty of people around to find fault with what you do. I recommend that you handle critics the way Levi did. — Do not handle them. Leave it to the Lord Jesus to handle them as he will.

## Levi's Christ

*“And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”* (vv. 31-32).

“What a lovely view to behold the Great Redeemer, encircled at *Matthew's* table, with *Publicans* and *Sinners*! The murmuring of the *Pharisees* is just as might be expected, and such as hath marked *Pharisees* in all ages. But what a lovely answer the Lord gave to the charge. The very character of Christ, as the Physician of the Soul, naturally led him to haunts of sickness, for the exercise of his profession. And by referring them to that memorable passage in the prophet (Hosea 6:6). Jesus took the words as applicable to himself in confirmation of his office Jehovah-Rophe, *I am the Lord that healeth thee* (Exodus 15:26).” (Robert Hawker)

The Lord Jesus Christ came to call sinners to repentance. None but sinners will come to Christ. And every sinner who comes to Christ is received by him. — The only way we can come to Christ (walk with him in faith) is as sinners in need of mercy (Colossians 2:6).

# Chapter 29

## “The Old is Better”

### Luke 5:33-39

“And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise *the disciples* of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was *taken* out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old *wine* straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better” (Luke 5:33-39).

The Lord Jesus had just saved an elect sinner by his almighty grace, an old publican named Levi (Matthew). Having experienced the saving goodness of God’s grace, having been forgiven of all sin, having seen the glory of God in the face of Christ, this sinner gladly forsook all and followed Christ.

Not only did he follow Christ, he wanted others to know him and follow him. He wanted other sinners to know the grace he now knew. He wanted other sin-sick souls to know the healing of the Master’s hand. So he threw a lavish dinner party in honor of the Son of God. Hoards of people came. – Tax Collectors –

Romans – Jewish Scribes – Pharisees – Disciples of John the Baptist – The Lord’s Disciples – The Son of God Himself – and Numerous Sinners.

When the scribes and Pharisees saw the Lord Jesus and his followers mingling with such riffraff, they raised their eyebrows and said, “*Why do you eat with publicans and sinners?*” The Master responded by saying, “*They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*”

Being totally ignorant of what he said, knowing that they were neither sick nor sinners (at least in their own opinion), they seem to have totally ignored the Savior’s words. But observing that John’s disciples kept the same outward religious customs and ceremonies (saying public prayers, fastings, etc.) that they kept, and the Lord’s disciples did not, the scribes and Pharisees perceived an opportunity to create trouble. They thought they could divide Christ’s kingdom. They thought they could drive a wedge between John the Baptist and the Lamb of God, by pointing out these glaring differences.

## Often Swayed

True believers are sometimes weak believers; and weak believers are often swayed and easily sidetracked, especially by the religious practices and customs of men. — “*And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise [the disciples] of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?*” (v. 33) In Matthew 9:14 the Holy Spirit shows us that John’s disciples strongly were influenced by these customs of the Pharisees.

John’s disciples, though true disciples, were greatly impressed by the Pharisees’ outward show of religion in public prayers, displays of fasting and the ostentatious washing of hands before eating. Christ’s sheep will not follow a stranger. God’s saints have an unction from the Holy One and cannot be deceived with regard to the gospel. But God’s saints in this world are only frail, fickle, sinful men and women of flesh and blood.

Sometimes they fall under the influence of wicked men, thinking that they are doing good. Sometimes, by bad influence from people they think are sincere, they get sidetracked by meaningless issues.

That is exactly what happened here with John's disciples. They got to listening to the Pharisees, with whom they had in common the practice of religious, ceremonial fasting. Ignoring the indescribably far greater issues of redemption, grace, and forgiveness, they joined the Pharisees (Of all people!), carping and criticizing the Lord Jesus and his disciples because they did not join in public displays of fasting.

If you will look at Matthew's account (Matthew 9:14), you will see clearly that it was not just the Pharisees who raised this issue, but John the Baptist's disciples with the Pharisees.

May God the Holy Spirit keep us from being moved away from the simplicity that is in Christ. We must not be side-tracked by the issues of carnal religion, from the gospel of Christ. If he can do so, Satan will use such things to divide the church of God (Ephesians 4:1-6).

## **Bride and Bridegroom**

In verses 34 and 35 our Savior teaches us a glorious fact about our relationship with him and with one another. – All true believers are the bride of Christ and he is our bridegroom.

“And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.”

This gospel age, is the time of our marriage feast. It is a time for feasting at the banqueting table of grace, a time for celebration and joy, not a time for mourning and fasting.

Fasting in the Old Testament was a symbol of repentance and mourning. Certain fasts were prescribed under the law as times of

personal and national public humiliation. But the Pharisees ignored the spiritual thing symbolized and capitalized on the outward ceremony. They not only insisted on keeping the fast days prescribed by the law, they added many, many more. In conjunction with their show of humility, these proud hypocrites added specified times of prayer, public shows of devotion, by which they could prove to the world around them and to one another how very holy and humble, devoted and diligent, good and godly they were! — Our Lord and his disciples had nothing to do with such nonsense. — Neither should we!

With regard to fasting, our Lord's doctrine is clear. His presence and grace removes all need for sorrow and mourning (that which fasting symbolized) among his people. He said, "*When the Bridegroom is taken away, then the bride will be sorrowful and mourn.*" And there was a time of weeping for the bride, when the Lord of Glory was crucified and buried. But with the resurrection of our Lord, his exaltation and enthronement, and the out-pouring of the Spirit of grace upon us, we now rejoice with joy unmingled. The bride's fasting days are over! Our sins are gone! Grace, righteousness and eternal life are ours! Christ, our faithful Savior, our divine Bridegroom, is with us to provide for us, protect us and comfort us. Why should we fast? These things rejoice our hearts!

The Lord Jesus here identifies himself as our Bridegroom and all chosen, redeemed sinners as his bride (Ephesians 5:25-30) The Son of God espoused himself to us in eternity. He bought us and washed us in his own blood. We are wed to him by faith, wearing the wedding garments of his provision. We are his bride and he is our Husband.

What does that mean? — We are the objects of his tender love. We are privileged to enjoy a mystical union with the Son of God. We are forever his. — "*What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder!*" — "*He hateh putting away!*" We shall forever participate in and possess all that is his (Romans 8:17). He who is the Bridegroom of our souls will one day present us before his Father and all the universe as his chaste virgin, spotless, holy, blameless!

## No Mixing

In verses 36-38 the Lord Jesus tells us that in spiritual matters we must never attempt to mix things that differ.

“And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was [taken] out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.”

Our Savior delivered this parable in response to the question raised by John's disciples and the Pharisees about fasting. With the Pharisees, fasting had become a common, publicly advertised ceremony. It was an outward show of holiness, piety and devotion. John's disciples seem to have placed great emphasis upon this religious custom as well. But our Lord always dealt with it as an insignificant thing and insisted that in fasting, in prayer and in giving (Matthew 6:16-18), in fact in anything and everything, we must never make a show of religion!

It may have been proper, our Lord says to John's disciples, for the friend of the bridegroom and his disciples to fast. But to require the bridegroom and his disciples to fast was as ludicrous as sewing a piece of new cloth in an old garment, or putting new wine into old bottles, or wineskins.

Actually the parables here given were simply proverbial sayings that may be applied to many things. Essentially, their meaning is simply this: — We must never try to mix things that do not mix. Many great evils that have arisen in the church could have been avoided if the lesson of these parables had simply been heeded. And many of the evils existing in the church today could be corrected if this lesson was followed.

In spiritual matters, we must never attempt to mix things that differ. Just as under the Mosaic law the mixture of linen and wool and the plowing of an ox and an ass together were prohibited, so

in this age, we cannot mix and must never try to mix law and grace, flesh and spirit, Christ and the world, or carnal ordinances with spiritual worship.

The problem at Galatia was that the Judaizers tried to put the old wine Mosaic laws and ceremonies into the new bottle of grace. They tried, like many today, to mix Judaism and Christianity. They tried to hold both to the law and the gospel. They wanted both Moses and Christ. They tried to mix physical circumcision with spiritual circumcision. Such a mixture can never take place. Either we are under the law, or we are free from the law. It cannot be both (Galatians 5:1-4).

In the early church many tried to mix the philosophies and religious customs of a pagan world with the gospel of Christ, just as they do today. Nothing is new under the sun. In the earliest days, after the apostles, and even while the apostles were living, there were those who attempted to make the gospel palatable to the world by mixing the religious customs, traditions and opinions of paganism with the gospel of Christ. The result was disastrous then, and shall be now. In those days compromise paved the road to Romanism. Today, many are paving a road back to Romanism as fast as possible.

We must never try to mix flesh and spirit or works and grace in the worship and service of our God (Philippians 3:3). There is absolutely no place in the worship of God for crosses, pictures pretending to represent the Lord Jesus Christ, our God, images and pictures of angels, religious relics and symbols, law rule, sabbath keeping, ceremonialism, crossings, kneelings, or anything not prescribed by our Lord and practiced by his disciples in the New Testament.

Many professing Christians today constantly attempt to stitch Christ and the world together. How many there are who seem determined to prove our Lord wrong, who try to serve both God and mammon. They wear the name of Christ in profession, but serve the world. They want to enjoy the new wine of Christ; but they want to drink it from the old bottle of the world. They will not utterly despise the new garment of discipleship, but they want it without cost or cross. So they try to sew it to the old garments

of pleasures, covetousness and love of the world. They will find one day soon that they have attempted that which cannot be done.

We must not attempt to put new wine into old bottles. Law and grace, flesh and spirit, the world and Christ simply cannot be mixed. We must choose one and hate the other.

In verse 39 our Lord shows us that in spiritual things “the old is better,” always better. — “No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.”

The gospel of Christ is often compared to wine in Scripture. Wine is representative of the Savior’s blood in the Lord’s Supper. The gospel is comparable to wine because of its sweetness, its reviving quality and its calming effect. If ever you taste the old wine of the gospel, the old wine of free grace, you will not want the new wine of this apostate age (Jeremiah 6:16).

# Chapter 30

## “The Second Sabbath after the First”

Luke 6:1-5

“And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing *them* in *their* hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone? And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath” (Luke 6:1-5).

There is a phrase used in the opening verse of this sixth chapter of Luke that is found nowhere else in the Bible. It is a phrase which has been the subject of much debate about nothing for hundreds and hundreds of years. The phrase is — “*The second sabbath after the first.*”

Some of the great theologians of the past tell us that this phrase refers to the sabbath following the cutting of the first sheaf of harvest during the Jews’ passover week. Others say the phrase refers to the three great sabbaths kept by the Jews every year (The Feast of Passover — The Feast of Pentecost — The Feast of Tabernacles), and that this sabbath was the sabbath kept during

the Feast of Pentecost.

Without question, this phrase refers to a sabbath day commonly known to the Jews living at the time as “*the second sabbath after the first*,” or (more literally) “the second first sabbath.” But who cares which one it was?

What is important is this: — Why did God the Holy Spirit inspire and direct Luke to these particular words here? That I am interested in knowing; and the answer is very simple. — The Lord of the sabbath had come to fulfill and forever abolish the first, carnal, ceremonial sabbath of the law, that he might establish that blessed second sabbath of the gospel, that he might forever be the Sabbath Rest of his people. — Christ is our Sabbath.

## A Deadly sin

*First*, the Spirit of God here sets before us a glaring example of a deadly sin. We are told here that on a certain sabbath day our Lord Jesus and his disciples walked through the corn fields. As they did, the disciples, being hungry, picked some ears of the grain, rubbed it in their hands, and had a snack.

Immediately, the Pharisees charged the Lord’s disciples with what they thought was a very serious crime. These men had broken the fourth commandment of the law. They had done work on the sabbath day! The deadly sin revealed here is not seen in the action of the disciples, but in the action of the Pharisees.

The most deadly of all is the sin of self-righteousness. Our Lord warns us in many ways and repeatedly to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. That leaven which corrupts and destroys everything it touches is self-righteousness and hypocrisy. Self-righteousness and hypocrisy attach great importance to outward things in religion, things other people see, applaud and reward; but it neglects inward, spiritual heart worship.

These Pharisees were sticklers for sabbath keeping, but notorious for covetousness (Luke 16:14). They strained the tiniest

gnat from their ceremonial religious cup regarding some things, and swallowed the camel in other matters. They were quick to censor, criticize, and condemn others.

God hates the spirit of the Pharisee! God almighty hates self-righteousness. Nothing is more abhorrent to him than the stench of self-righteousness (Isaiah 65:1-5; Luke 18:9-14; Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 23:23).

And nothing is more likely to keep a sinner from Christ than self-righteousness (Romans 9:30-10:4). Religion without Christ is the most damning thing in this world. Every act, practice, profession and pretense of religion without Christ is eating and drinking damnation to your soul, not discerning the Lord's body, not understanding the gospel.

## A Defending Savior

*Second*, the Lord Jesus Christ is set before us in this passage as a defending Savior. No sooner did the Pharisees accuse the disciples of evil than the Lord Jesus took up their cause and defended them against their accusers. He answered the cavils of their enemies. He did not leave his followers to answer for and defend themselves. He answered for them and defended them.

What a blessed, encouraging, delightful picture this is of our Savior's unceasing work on our behalf! We read in the Book of God of one who is called "*the accuser of the brethren, who accuses them day and night*" (Revelation 12:10). He is Satan, the prince of darkness. How often we accommodate our accuser, giving him many grounds for his accusations! How many charges he might justly lay against us! But he, who is our Savior, ever pleads our cause, both in heaven and on earth, and defends us. Christ is our Rock, our Salvation, our Refuge, our Defense and our Defender (1 John 2:1-2; Romans 8:28-35).

When my adversary, the devil, accuses me of some evil by the lips of a man on earth, I respond, "Let Christ answer for me." When the fiend of hell accuses me of horrid evils in my own mind and conscience, as he often does, I respond, "Let Christ

answer for me.” In the day of judgment should that wicked one be allowed to appear, point his accusing finger, and attempt to have my crimes charged against me, I will yet respond, “Let Christ answer for me.”

## A Delightful Sabbath

*Third*, the Spirit of God points us to a delightful sabbath. I read one commentator’s explanation of this passage, and could hardly believe what he put on paper. I knew he was inclined toward legality; but I was still surprised by what he wrote. As he attempted to protect sabbath observance, he said, “We must not interpret the Lord’s words in this passage as an indication that the fourth commandment is no longer to bind Christians.”

The Lord Jesus Christ did not come here to bind his people with the rigors of legal bondage. He came here to set his people free. He who is our Savior is both the Lord of the sabbath and our Sabbath (Luke 6:5). The Word of God speaks clearly.

“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” (Romans 10:4)

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.” (Colossians 2:16-17)

Christ, as the Lord of the sabbath, is the one who established it. He is the one for whom it was established. He is the one to whom it pointed, the one typified by it. Christ is the one who fulfilled it. Having fulfilled it, he abolished it forever (Romans 10:4; Colossians 2:16-17).

We rejoice to keep the gospel sabbath of faith; but the pretentious practice of observing a carnal, legal sabbath day is specifically prohibited in Colossians 2:16. We keep that which is here called, “*the second Sabbath after the first*,” the blessed sabbath of rest in Christ. Coming to him, we cease from our own works and rest in him (Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 4:9-11). The

penalty of not keeping this sabbath is death, eternal death. That is the penalty God places upon all the works men do for salvation (John 3:36).

I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
“Come unto me and rest;  
Lay down, thou weary one lay down,  
Thy head upon my breast.”

I came to Jesus as I was,  
Weary, and worn, and sad;  
I found in Him a resting place,  
And He has made me glad!

# Chapter 31

## “On Another Sabbath”

Luke 6:6-11

“And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him. But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy *it*? And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus” (Luke 6:6-11).

Why did the Lord Jesus do so many of his miraculous works of healing on the sabbath day? Why did he so often go out of his way to say and do things he knew would be most offensive to the Pharisees? How does the Son of God meet rebel sinners? What was the nature and purpose of the sabbath? Who is Jesus Christ? Was he just a man, as many blasphemously assert; or is he both God and man in one glorious, inseparable person? Does it really matter what we think about who Christ is? What is involved in the Lord’s call? How does God call sinners to life and faith in Christ? What affect does the gospel of Christ and the power of his grace have upon men?

These are all questions which are clearly and decisively answered by the Holy Spirit in Luke 6:6-11. Here, Luke gives us a very brief, but very instructive narrative of the healing of a man with a withered arm on the sabbath day. Like all of our Lord's miracles, this miraculous healing is a picture of the saving operations of his grace in and upon chosen sinners. The miracle was performed specifically to give us an instructive picture of God's salvation.

## A Deliberate Confrontation

The *first* thing we see in this passage is our Lord's deliberate confrontation of the Pharisees (vv. 6, 7, and 9).

"And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him...Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy *it*?"

The preaching of the gospel is always confrontational. God's servants are sent to his enemies and sent to confront them, not to coddle them, pamper them and bargain with them, but, as the ambassadors of God himself, to confront them with the claims of the sovereign Lord. There is no such thing as faith in Christ apart from surrender to Christ as Lord (Luke 14:25-33).

We see this confrontation clearly exemplified by our Savior in this passage. Our Lord Jesus Christ deliberately confronted the Pharisees, both by his words and his works. He always does. The Son of God always confronts sinners at their point of rebellion and demands that they surrender to him as their Lord. That is the way he dealt with both the rich young ruler (Luke 18) and the Samaritan woman (John 4). This is exactly what we see in this passage, too. Here is just one of many examples of our Lord confronting these self-righteous, religious hypocrites on the

sabbath.

Did you ever notice how often our Savior performed his miraculous works on the sabbath day? Did you ever wonder why he chose the sabbath for so many of these displays of his omnipotent mercy? It was on the sabbath day that he healed this man's withered arm. It was on the sabbath day that he cured the demoniac in the synagogue (Mark 1:21-28). The woman who was afflicted with an infirmity for eighteen years was cured by his mercy on the sabbath day (Luke 13:10-18). It was the sabbath day when our Lord Jesus healed the man with the dropsy (Luke 14:1-6). It was on the sabbath day that he healed the lame man by the pool of Bethesda (John 5:16). And it was on the sabbath day that he healed the man born blind (John 9:1-12).

These things were not done on the sabbath day accidentally. They were performed on the sabbath day for the calculated purpose of our Lord to assert his claim of dominion over all things as Lord, even of the sabbath (v. 5). It was Christ himself who kept the first sabbath. It was Christ himself who gave the law of the sabbath. As a man, he became subject to the law in all things. Yet, he is Lord of the law. As such, because he is God as well as man, he cannot be put under the yoke and bondage of the law. The law does not rule the King. The King rules the law. And Christ is the King.

The Lord Jesus chose to perform his work of mercy upon this poor, needy soul on the sabbath day in order to expose and condemn the hypocrisy and mean-spirited traditions of religious legalists. As it was in our Lord's day, so it is in ours. There is no point at which religious legalists are more hypocritical, more bound by the religious customs and traditions of men, and more mean-spirited than in their efforts to impose and enforce sabbath laws upon men.

The Pharisees could not answer our Lord's question about whether it was right to do good on the Sabbath because they would not answer it, lest they expose themselves. Their intention was to accuse the Master. If he refused to heal this man, they wanted to accuse him, either of weakness and inability to heal him, or of cruelty for not healing him. Any answer they might

give would have exposed them. These religious hypocrites would have preferred the man be left with an impotent arm, rather than see him healed. They were far more interested in maintaining the rigors of the law (their interpretation of the law), than in relieving the needs of men. And they excused their meanness in the name of honoring God!

Our Lord Jesus chose to perform this miracle of mercy on the sabbath to show us plainly what the true nature and purpose of the sabbath was. The sabbath day, like all other ordinances of the legal, Mosaic age, was designed and instituted to portray the gospel of Christ. It was never intended merely to be a day of religious bondage, but a day portraying the rest of faith in Christ. The sabbath was designed to show sinners how God does men good, eternal good, who deserve evil, by causing sinners to rest in Christ (Matthew 11:28-30). The sabbath was ordained to show us how God has purposed from eternity to save life by the obedience of Christ. It was a picture of Christ's finished work and of our resting in him, ceasing from our works by faith in him.

The Son of God chose to perform this miracle on the sabbath to display the fact that he had come to fulfill and forever put an end to the law of the sabbath (v. 9). Yes, Christ is the end of the law (Romans 10:4). He finished it, fulfilled it, and put an end to it.

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ” (Colossians2:16-17).

## A Divine Attribute

The second thing we see in this narrative is the display of a divine attribute. — *"But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth"* (v. 8). The Lord Jesus *"knew their thoughts."* This is another of those many, many almost casual, nonchalant references given in the New Testament, by which the Holy Spirit declares the fact of our

Savior's eternal Godhead. This man, Jesus of Nazareth, is a man; but he is more than a man. This man is the omniscient, all-knowing God (Hebrews 4:13).

He who is our Savior is and must be God in human flesh. It cannot be stated too emphatically or too often that Christ is, indeed, "*over all God blessed forever.*" Every attempt of men to compromise his absolute, eternal deity is both a denial of the gospel and blasphemy. Those who tell us that Christ is not God, absolutely God, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, immutable, eternal, just and holy, are not Christians, but pagans masquerading as Christians. Only one who is himself God knows sees and hears the thoughts of men.

Nothing is more humbling and, at the same time, comforting and encouraging to believing hearts than our blessed Savior's omniscience. To the religious hypocrite, this is a terrifying thing. To the believer, it is delightful. Let us be humbled by the fact that our dear Savior knows us inside out. Nothing is hidden from him. Yet, we ought to rejoice in this, too, — Our blessed Savior knows what we really are. This was the thing that gave Peter consolation after his horrible sin. He said to the Lord Jesus, "*Thou knowest that I love thee.*" Our great Redeemer's name is Jehovah-jireh — "The Lord will see." — "The Lord will provide." — "The Lord will be seen."

## An Effectual Command

The *third* thing we see in this passage is an effectual command. The Lord Jesus, we read, "*said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth...And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other*" (vv. 8, 10).

Unlike the pretended miracles of papists and pentecostals, our Lord's miraculous works were performed in broad daylight, performed upon people everyone present knew were impotent, and performed in the most public manner possible. He was not a pretend healer. He is the Healer. But the message of our text is

not about the healing of a man's withered hand. The healing of this man's withered hand was a miracle performed by our Lord to portray the far greater miracle of grace he performs upon chosen sinners, when he saves us by his omnipotent mercy! The healing of this man is a most instructive picture of the almighty, effectual call and irresistible grace of God, by which we are brought from death to life in Christ. Look at it...

*"He said to the man with the withered hand"* Here is a particular, personal call. It is written, *"He calleth his own sheep by name."* This was also a discriminating, distinguishing call. We have no idea how many others were present, or with what needs they had come. But Luke tells us plainly that on this occasion the Master called none but this man alone. How we ought to thank God for his special, discriminating grace (Psalm 65:4; Matthew 22:14; 1 Corinthians 4:7).

"Tis not that I did choose Thee,  
For Lord that could not be.  
This heart would still refuse Thee,  
Hadst Thou not chosen me!"

Next, the Lord Jesus called this man to do what he had absolutely no ability to do. The Master issued an impossible command. He said to the man with a dried up, withered, paralyzed arm, *"Stretch forth thy hand."* If he could stretch forth his hand, he would not have been there.

I stress this point, because men often tell us, "If the sinner has no ability to repent and believe the gospel, he cannot be called to do so." Such attempts to deny the gospel of Christ simply will not hold water. The Lord Jesus commanded this man to stretch forth his withered hand.

*"And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other."* How can this be? Find out the answer and you will find out how spiritually dead sinners arise from the dead and flee to Christ. This man did not stretch forth his hand by the mere exercise of his will. He did not just decide to stretch forth his hand. He did not just muster the power from within himself to stretch forth his hand. But he did stretch forth his hand. How?

The answer is found in Luke 18:26-27. God who issued the command gave power to obey the command; and he stretched forth his hand.

By preaching the gospel, spiritually dead sinners are called to arise from the dead, to stretch forth their withered hands, and lay hold of Christ by faith. Any sinner who obeys the gospel, any sinner who believes on Christ, any sinner who rises from his spiritual grave and comes to Christ is immediately made whole and has eternal life.

But there is a problem. No sinner can do it. Remember, the sinner is dead! He has no ability to stretch forth his hand. He has no ability to come to Christ. However, when the Lord God almighty, by the life-giving power of his omnipotent, irresistible grace, calls the dead sinner, the sinner rises from death, stretches forth his withered hand, lays hold of Christ and is made whole.

There is no power in preachers. When all a person hears is the voice of a preacher, he remains dead. There is no power in the preacher's voice. But when God speaks by the gospel, there is power, life-giving, resurrection power in the call that God issues (John 5:25; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; Revelation 20:6).

We should also note the fact that this man was not made whole until he stretched forth his hand. When the Lord's command came, this poor man, believing Christ, stretched forth his hand. He did not raise questions. He did not quibble about whether or not he could do it, whether or not the Lord had ordained it, or whether or not he would be made whole by doing it. He simply stretched forth his hand. When he did, his hand was made whole.

## A Dividing Savior

*“And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus”* (v. 11). The gospel of Christ and the wonders of his grace always divide people. Our Lord said, *“I came not to send peace, but a sword.”* And whenever the gospel is preached, whenever God does his work of

grace, a division is made because of Christ. The gospel separates men, families, churches and communities. It divides light from darkness. It separates the wheat from the chaff. It divides sheep from goats. It is a savor of life unto life to some, and a savor of death unto death to others (2 Corinthians 2:14-17). On this occasion the Pharisees were enraged, the man with the withered hand was made whole and the Lord's disciples were edified, instructed and encouraged.

# Chapter 32

## Prayer, Preaching, Power

### Luke 6:12-19

“And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called *unto him* his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas *the brother* of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor. And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed *them all*” (Luke 6:12-19).

In the paragraph before us we have the Holy Spirit’s description of our Lord’s calling and ordination of his twelve apostles. Though the apostolic office ceased with the apostolic age, the calling of these men is still very instructive. This passage teaches us much concerning the blessed work of the gospel ministry.

## First Ordination Service

These twelve men were the first men set apart by Christ in this gospel age and sent forth to proclaim the glad tidings of God's free grace in him. This was the beginning of what is often called "the Christian ministry." Without question, all the prophets of the Old Testament preached the same gospel these men preached. John the Baptist preached the same message, too. And God's servants today preach that same glorious gospel of the grace of God. The singular message of God's servants is Jesus Christ and him crucified. As Pastor Scott Richardson once said, "Any sermon that does not have Christ for its beginning, middle and end is a mistake in its conception and a crime in its execution."

This was the first ordination service of the New Testament era. Let it be observed that the ordination of a man to the work of the gospel is the work of the Lord God himself. If a man is called and sent of God to preach the gospel that is his ordination. Our public ordination services are only the public recognition of a man's gifts by the local church. We have no ability to make men preachers. All we do in ordaining a man to the ministry is publicly acknowledge our recognition of his gifts and publicly identify ourselves with him, commending him to men as God's messenger.

How far we have degenerated from the pattern of the New Testament in all things! This degeneration is seen most clearly in this first ordination of gospel preachers. What is called "ordination" today is similar only in name. When our Lord ordained twelve, the whole affair was simple and solemn.

As in all things relating to the Church and kingdom of God, everything concerning the work of the gospel ministry depends upon and is determined by Christ alone.

## Prayer

When the Lord Jesus ordained these first twelve preachers, he did so after much prayer. — *"And it came to pass in those days, that*

*he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles” (vv. 12-13).*

This fact is here recorded to teach us the great place and importance of prayer in all aspects of divine service. It is particularly designed to show us that God’s servants ought always to be the objects of his people’s fervent prayers.

The most important thing for a congregation to do when seeking a pastor is pray. — Pray for God to send a pastor after his own heart (Jeremiah 3:15). The most important thing for a man to do, before he takes up the work of the gospel ministry, is pray. — - Pray, like Moses did in Exodus 33, that God will direct him and show him plainly what his purpose is. — *“Show me now thy way...If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.”*

I will not attempt to say who is or who is not called of God to preach the gospel. That is God’s work alone. But this I know: — If God calls a man to this work he will be a man chosen of God for the work. — *“Of them he chose twelve.”* The Lord will give him the gifts sufficient for the work and a burden for the work. God’s people will want to hear him; and God will put him in the work. If the Lord God puts a man into the ministry, he will give that man a love for the work; and he will give him success in the work.

An ego trip is not a call of God. Let no man run who has not been called and sent of God with the message of grace burning in his soul. Preachers who are not sent of God are a hindrance, not a help in the work of the gospel.

If you would help the cause of Christ, pray for his servants. — *“Brethren, pray for us.”*

*“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves.”*  
(1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have *free* course, and be glorified, even as *it is* with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all *men* have not faith.” (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2)

If your pastor is to be useful in the hands of God, he needs your prayers. He must be faithful in prayer, in study, in the Word, in doctrine, and in behavior. But you must be faithful in prayer for him. The work is heavy. He carries the burden of the Word of the Lord. The responsibilities are enormous. Your pastor, if he is a faithful man, carries the weight of speaking in God’s name the message of life or of condemnation to eternity bound sinners! Yet, those men who preach the gospel know themselves to be insignificant, weak and sinful, nothing but worthless worms. The work of preaching the gospel requires wisdom, “*knowledge and understanding;*” but we are ignorant.

## Preaching

“*Who is sufficient for these things?*” Gospel preaching is a work for which God alone can make a man sufficient. — “*Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor*” (vv. 14-16).

Look at these twelve men. Four of them were fishermen. One of them was a publican. They were, for the most part at least, Galileans. Not one of them was wealthy, politically connected, powerful, or influential. They were, obviously, in the world’s esteem, “*unlearned and ignorant men*” (Acts 4:13). What are we to learn from these facts? Why were these things written?

1. The church and kingdom of God is entirely independent of the world. — God’s church is not built by might, nor by power, but by his Spirit (Zechariah 4:6; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31).
2. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but

spiritual (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Romans 1:15-17).

I must not fail to call your attention to the fact that one of the first twelve preachers was Judas Iscariot, a devil and a betrayer. I have often wondered why the Lord Jesus put Judas among the twelve. Haven't you? The Master knew that Judas was a graceless man, that he was a deceiver and a hypocrite from the beginning. Yet, he put him among the apostles, preached with him and sat with him at the Lord's Table. Why? There are some things about this which ought to be obvious.

Our Lord would teach all preachers of the gospel the necessity of constant, personal self-examination. — "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.*" God's servants must not be idolized. Esteem them highly. Pray for them faithfully. Follow their faith, their doctrine and their example. But do not make an idol out of any man. "*Let no man glory in men.*" No faithful man desires either adulation or blind allegiance (1 Corinthians 3:5-9; 2 Corinthians 4:1-7).

Yet, in the church of God, so long as we are in this world, we must expect to find the bad mixed with the good, tares among wheat, goats among sheep and unbelievers among faithful men. God will, in his time, separate the precious from the vile. We have no ability to do so. If a man's message is a false gospel, he clearly identifies himself as a false prophet. But we dare not assume that we can read the motives of a man's heart. So long as he preaches the gospel and lives uprightly, we must not attempt to judge whether he is or is not God's messenger.

## Power

The great secret to the power and efficacy of gospel preaching is the presence of Christ. — "*And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed*

them *all*" (vv. 17-19).

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down. — "*He came down with them and stood in the company of his disciples.*" The people who came to hear the gospel came with great needs. They came to hear him. They came with great need desiring to be healed. And they sought to touch him. When they did, "*Virtue went out of him and healed them all.*" May God the Holy Spirit ever show us and make us to know our great need of Christ. May he enable us, every time we gather with his saints to worship our God, to seek to hear our Savior and seek to touch him and be touched by him, that virtue may come out of him to our souls!

# Chapter 33

## Four Great Contrasts

### Luke 6:20-26

“And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed *be ye* poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed *are ye* that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed *are ye* that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you *from their company*, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward *is* great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:20-26).

The things revealed in these few verses of Inspiration are the meat of the Word, upon which only the strong can feed. By comparison, the glorious gospel doctrines of divine sovereignty, eternal predestination, free election, particular, effectual redemption, irresistible grace and the everlasting security of God’s elect in Christ are baby milk and baby food. Many who love to nurse upon the breasts of election and predestination choke on the things revealed in our Lord’s doctrine here.

Here our Master proclaims some of the most important things taught in Holy Scripture. These are spiritual truths that are galling to our flesh. May God the Holy Spirit give us eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to heed the things he inspired Luke to record in

this place.

## Obvious Differences

While the sermon which begins here and runs through the end of this chapter, in many ways resembles our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (recorded in Matthew 5-7), it must not be confused with it. I am aware that the vast majority of good commentators say they are the same; but a careful reading of the two makes it obvious that they are not. Though there are similarities, the differences are obvious.

For one thing, the sermon recorded by Matthew is properly called "The Sermon on the Mount," because it was a sermon delivered upon a mountain side. The sermon here was delivered in the plain (v. 17).

The Sermon on the Mount was delivered before our Lord had named his twelve apostles. This sermon was delivered immediately after he named them.

It is obvious that the two sermons are tremendously different in length. — It might be thought that Luke was inspired to give a much more brief summary of the same message than Matthew was inspired to record, but there are some things found in this sermon which are not mentioned in the far more lengthy Sermon on the Mount. If this was just a shorter version of the same sermon, we would expect some things to be left out; but we would not expect things to be included here that were omitted from the more lengthy version.

In the passage before us the Master is speaking specifically to his disciples, to those who were truly his disciples and to those who were his disciples in name only. In these seven, short verses he lays the ax to the root of the tree and distinguishes clearly between true believers and mere lip service professors. He does so by making four great, glaring contrasts between true believers and false professors. First, he gives us four beatitudes, which characterize the true believer. Then he gives us four woes, which characterize the false professor.

## Four Beatitudes

In verses 20-23 our Savior gives four words of blessing, four beatitudes, four conditions of true blessedness and happiness, by which all true believers are characterized.

Who are those men and women whom the Son of God pronounces blessed? The list is both remarkable and shocking. It is totally out of sync with the opinion of the world. Here, our Lord singles out those who are poor, hungry, sorrowful and hated, and calls them blessed. How can this be? Let's look at each beatitude and see what the Master here teaches us.

1. "*Blessed are ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God*" (v. 21). — He does not say, blessed are the poor, but "*blessed are YOU POOR.*" In the Sermon on the Mount he said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit*" (Matthew 5:1). Those who are poor in spirit are those men and women who have been taught of God the utter depravity, corruption and sinfulness of their hearts. They are men and women who are convinced of sin, righteousness and judgment by God the Holy Spirit. The poor in spirit confess their sins and find forgiveness in Christ, being washed in his blood and robed in his righteousness.

All who are blessed of God with grace, salvation and eternal life in Christ are poor in Spirit. But, here our Savior speaks of something else.

Here, the Master says, "*Blessed are ye poor.*" We must not imagine that the Lord is here making physical poverty a spiritual blessing and giving men a claim to heavenly glory upon the basis of earthly poverty. Here, our Lord is talking about physical, earthly, material poverty; but it is poverty accompanied by grace.

The Lord Jesus chose twelve apostles and sent them out to evangelize the world. He sent them out without any means visible of earthly support into a hostile world. When he did, he commanded them plainly not to provide for themselves and not to go begging for help from the world, and told them plainly that they would be hated, persecuted and driven out from the

company of men.

Is it possible to conduct any kind of ministry in this way? Is it possible to evangelize the world this way? Not only is it possible, there is no other way! This is the only way God's servants and God's church can perform the work the Lord God has trusted to our hands.

Poverty itself is not virtuous and is not a blessing. In fact, poverty is often the result of divine judgment. In our text the Lord Jesus is talking about a willing, deliberate, self-imposed poverty. This is not the self-imposed poverty of hermits and monks, but the poverty men and women knowingly bring upon themselves by following Christ, obeying the will of God and serving the interests of his kingdom.

This is not the poverty which comes as the result of laziness, because a man pretends to be too spiritual to work. This is that poverty which comes when a man or woman counts the costs and forsakes all to follow Christ. In the early days of Christianity those who followed Christ literally gave up everything, often even life itself, because of their faith in and love for him.

Though our circumstances are somewhat different today, it is still true that those who follow Christ forsake all to follow him and love not their lives, even unto death. All true believers do exactly what our Lord required the rich young ruler to do. They sell all they have and follow him.

2. "Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled" (v. 21). — In Matthew 5:6, in the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

There our Lord declares that all who are born of God, hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God in Christ. They long to stand before God in the perfect righteousness of Christ, and long to be perfectly conformed to Christ in righteousness and true holiness (Philippians 3:7-15). All who do truly hunger and thirst after this righteousness shall have it. They shall be filled.

Here, our Lord is declaring that those who hunger for the gospel's sake shall be filled. Believers are people who willingly

deprive themselves of that which they might otherwise lawfully enjoy for the gospel's sake. They are willing to get along on less, so that they can give more. They do not have to have the finer things. They do not have to lavish themselves in luxury, but rather prefer to do without so that they may have to give for the furtherance of the gospel. Believers know that things craved by the flesh are only temporal and can never satisfy. So they do not mind giving them up. We look for satisfaction, we look to be filled in another world.

These are matters which apply to and are seen in all true believers; and they are matters which must and do characterize gospel preachers. God's servants are men separated unto the gospel. They do not seek to enrich themselves by the gospel, but rather sacrifice the comforts and luxuries of life for the gospel. God's servants do not seek the possessions of men, but their souls.

3. "*Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh*" (v. 21) — Sorrow is not itself beneficial or sanctifying. Our Lord is here talking about those who weep for his sake. Believers, as long as we live in this world of woe, have countless nights of weeping and tears. Like all other people, we experience the sorrows of sickness, pain, bereavement, broken homes, wayward children and earthly trouble.

In addition to the sorrows of the world, those who know, trust, love and follow Christ carry other burdens which cause them to weep. We carry the heavy load of our corrupt nature and constant sin. We carry the load of care for the souls of men. And we carry the heavy load of care for the church, the kingdom and the glory of our God in this world. Yet, those who sow in tears will reap in joy. — "*Ye shall laugh!*" "*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*" The time of laughter shall soon come. We shall, at last, be filled with consolation. We shall soon possess unending, uninterrupted, everlasting joy! The joy of perfect righteousness, perfect peace, perfect understanding and perfect satisfaction!

4. "*Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when*

they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets" (vv. 22-23).

Our Lord is here talking about religious persecution, persecution brought upon us because of the gospel we preach. The words used here are used specifically with regard to ecclesiastical censure and discipline. Our Lord could not have used stronger words to picture the heaping of man's wrath upon his people for the gospel's sake.

Hatred, persecution, slander and reproach are the devices of Satan, not the tools of God's church and people. We ought not allow Satan's rage, displayed in the wrath of men, cause us too much pain. The tables will soon be turned.

## Four Woes

"But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (vv. 24-26).

Stronger, more cutting, condemning statements than these cannot be found in the New Testament. But what do these words mean? We must not imagine that the mere possession of wealth is a curse. Job's great wealth was the token of God's favor toward him. We must not think that the mere display of laughter and joy is a sign of God's wrath. David was a man who often spoke of laughter and displayed it both in song and dance; and he was a man after God's own heart. We certainly must not imagine that the possession of a good name is an indication of a foul heart. Timothy was a man whose name was well spoken of by those outside the church as well as within it.

Who, then, are these men and women of whom the Master

speaks, when he says, "*Woe unto you*"? They are those people who prefer the world to Christ, who prefer the riches of the world to the riches of his grace, who prefer the laughter of lusts to the happiness of holiness, who delight more in gain than in godliness, who love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Our Lord knew, from the beginning, that there would be many in the professed church, many who claim to be his disciples in every age who, though convinced of the truth of the gospel and professing to love it, would yet live for the world in the lusts of their flesh. To all such men and women, the Son of God says, "*Woe unto you!*"

This is what our Lord declares. Let men think and say what they may. This is the doctrine of this passage. Those who are poor because they choose to follow Christ and serve him, rather than enrich themselves, are possessors of the kingdom of God. Those who choose and seek and get riches will perish with their moth eaten treasures. They have all here they will ever have, the consolation of thick clay. Those who prefer to be hungry in doing the will of God, to fullness in rebelling, shall be filled forever. Those who live to fill their bellies and their lusts shall be hungry forever in hell. Those who choose a path of sorrow for the glory of God, carrying the weight of weighty matters upon their hearts, shall be filled with the laughter of complete satisfaction in heaven. Those who live here for pleasure shall find nothing but sorrow forever in hell. Those who prefer the favor and praise of God to the favor and praise of men shall be numbered among the sons of God forever, in everlasting praise. Those who prefer the favor and praise of men to the favor and praise of God shall be the objects of everlasting contempt, from both God and men in hell forever!

# Chapter 34

## How can I live among men for the glory of God?

### Luke 6:27-38

“But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not *to take thy* coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to* the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:27-38).

How can I live among men for the glory of God? If you are a believer, I am sure that is a question you often ponder in the

various situations you face day by day. How can I glorify God in this situation? How can I live among men for the honor of God my Savior and the gospel of his grace? What would the Lord have me to do here? What is God's will in this place and at this time?

If we would live among men for the glory of God, we must love them. Love is always right. It is the will of God for us to love one another, to love our neighbors as ourselves; and our neighbors include family, friends, brethren in Christ, and even our most implacable enemies. That is our Savior's doctrine in this passage. May he graciously apply his doctrine to our hearts by his Spirit.

The Lord Jesus here declares, that to all who profess to be his disciples, that those who follow him love people, not just that they love to be around people, but that they love people. Love is the great, identifying mark of true Christianity. Love is the sweet bond of peace. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Love is that without which we are nothing before God. Love is that sweet grace identified first as the fruit of the Spirit.

It will profit us greatly and may even make us profitable to others to carefully study and diligently practice that which is taught in these verses.

## **The Basis of Appeal**

I am calling for all who read these lines, professing to be followers of Christ, to live among the people of this world in exemplary love, to love your brothers and sisters in the kingdom of God and your neighbors for the glory of God. But before we can exemplify the love of Christ, we must know the love of Christ.

You cannot gather grapes among thorns, or figs among thistles. You cannot expect flowers where there are no roots, or fruit without trees. It is not possible to have the fruit of the Spirit unless you are united to Christ by faith, born of his Spirit and sanctified by his grace. Until you are born of God, it is not

possible for you to exemplify the love of Christ.

So the basis of my appeal is this: — If you have experienced the mercy, grace and love of God in Christ, show that same mercy, grace and love to others.

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” (Ephesians 4:32-5:2)

It is not possible for anyone to possess the fruit of the Spirit who does not know the doctrine of the Spirit, the doctrine of Christ. There are hoards of people today who go to great pains to show other people how loving, self-denying and sacrificial they are, who utterly despise the gospel of Christ; but theirs is only the hypocritical pretense of love demonstrated by the Pharisees in John 8:1-2 and in John 9.

“Once for all,” wrote J. C. Ryle, “let us understand, that real, genuine, self-denying love, will never grow from any roots but faith in Christ’s atonement, and a heart renewed by the Holy Ghost. We shall never make men love one another, unless we teach as Paul taught, ‘*Walk in love as Christ hath loved us.*’ Teaching love on any other principle is...labor in vain”

Those who do not know the doctrine of Christ, who do not know the gospel of the grace of God, do not and cannot know the love of God. Those who do not have the love of God dwelling in them cannot walk in the love of Christ and exercise that love toward others.

Do you know the love of God? Have you experienced his grace? Are you born of his Spirit? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Are you robed in the righteousness of God’s dear Son? Are you a saved, justified, forgiven, heaven born soul? If you are, the basis of my appeal is the mercy, love and grace you have experienced. I am calling for saved sinners to act like their Savior. Those who have experienced grace ought to be, and are, gracious. Those who have experienced mercy ought to be, and

are, merciful. Those who have been forgiven ought to be, and are, forgiving. Those who know the love of God in Christ ought to love others for Christ's sake, and do.

## Love's Character

Our Lord Jesus plainly shows us the character of true love. The nature and character of true love is the nature and character of his love. How often have you said, or heard someone say, "They love in their own way"? Phooey on their way. If we love, we love God's way. There is no other way to love.

Who are we to love? — The Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to love our neighbors. Religious Pharisees and hypocrites ask, "*Who is my neighbor?*" (Luke 10:29). Our Lord tells us exactly who we are to love.

"But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you." (vv. 27-28)

Our love toward others is to be like our Redeemer's love toward us: unselfish, disinterested, expecting no return of love from those we love. Our Lord Jesus loves us freely. So let us love others freely. He expects no return for his love, except wrath, unless he himself creates love for himself in the sinners he loves. So let us love, expecting nothing from the objects of our love. The Master says, "*Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return*" (v. 35).

How are we to love those who despise us? We would be wise to hear what the Son of God says about this, and ignore the psychologists, psychiatrists, marriage counselors and social workers of this God-hating, self-loving society. How are we to love people? Read verses 29-30, and you will see.

"And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to *take thy* coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not

again.”

Our Lord is not here demanding utter passivity. He is not requiring that we allow those who would rob us, take our homes, or murder us to do as they wish. He is talking here about insignificant things. Oh, how I pray that God will give me grace to treat insignificant things as insignificant things!

Love gives in. Love gives up much. Love endures much. Love is kind. Love strives to avoid strife. Love sacrifices personal rights and desires for its object, and even submits to wrong for the sake of peace. Love, like the great Lover of our souls, is meek and lowly of heart, long-suffering, gentle and kind. This is what our Master teaches us concerning the character of love (Romans 12:9-21; 14:19; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13). May he give us grace to exemplify it to one another in the house of God, in our homes, and to the world around us.

## Essential to Godliness

Is your heart ruled, governed, and motivated by the love of Christ? Do you have within you the kind of love that Christ produces in his people! Do I? Love is absolutely essential to true godliness. Paul tells us that if we have all other things, and have not love, they shall profit us nothing. The absence of love is fatal. As you read such passages as I have cited in this study, do not think to yourself, “Love is a very great virtue, most commendable and useful; it would be a great thing if I could obtain it.” Oh, no! We must have it!

God the Holy Spirit tells us that this love is something which characterizes all who are born of God. We must have it, or else we are not born of God. If I do not have this love, no matter what else I may have, no matter what else I may do, if I do not have the love of Christ in my heart, I am a lost man; and the same is true of you. This love is not a condition to be met in order to get salvation; but it is one sure result of God’s saving grace in Christ.

Christian love is greater than all other spiritual gifts and graces. Without love, all other gifts and graces are meaningless

and useless (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). This one thing, love, is the fulfilling of the law of God (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10). And love is the one sure mark and evidence of a saving union with the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "*By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*" (John 13:35).

Where this love is absent, grace is absent. No man is born of God who does not have the love of Christ implanted in his heart as a ruling principle of life (1 John 2:9-11; 3:14, 23; 4:7, 8, 16, 20; 5:1).

The love of Christ, or the absence of it, is a thing easily identifiable. This is not some profound, mysterious point of theology. It is not some sweet-sounding, but useless, emotion. The love of Christ is a gift of divine grace, that is clearly demonstrated in the lives of God's elect (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). This love causes a person to be kind, patient, content, gentle, even tempered, humble, self-denying, generous, honest, truthful, forbearing and forgiving toward others, both in the church and out of it.

Love is preferable to all other gifts and greater than all other graces, because love is the only thing that will last forever (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). All other gifts will come to an end. All other graces will cease. But love will go on in heaven. Faith will be no more, when we see him whom we have believed. Hope will be no more, when we have that for which we have hoped. But love will continue and come to perfection, when we enter heaven. Love is the only thing we have in this world that we can carry with us into the world to come. Heaven is a world of love, perfect, unceasing, glorious, Christ-like love. No one will enter that city of peace and world of love, except those who have the love of Christ in their hearts.

## **Blessed Rule**

Our dear Savior, the Lord Jesus, gives us a very simple and blessed rule by which to live, the rule of love. — "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise"

(V. 31. — “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven” (v. 37).

Our Lord knew that in this world the line between right and wrong, in dealing with neighbors and friends, family and foe, would often be very hazy. Personal feelings and private interests often dim our view of things and cloud our judgment. So the Lord Jesus gave us this guide. He tells us to treat others as we would have them treat us.

To do to others as they do to us, to return evil for evil, bite for bite, injury for injury, is beastly. To return good for evil is to walk in the steps of our Master. Let us always endeavor to put the best construction on the actions and words of other, judging them and their deeds as charitably as possible. Always be very slow to condemn another and swift to forgive. Let all error in dealing with other people be on the side of leniency, not on the side of severity. We do not have to form an opinion about everything, much less express an opinion about everything, everyone, or everyone’s actions. — Believers live by principles the world simply cannot understand. We live by the rule of Christ and the example of his love (John 13:15; 2 Corinthians 5:14).

“For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to the evil.*” (vv. 32-35)

As our heavenly Father is “*kind to the unthankful and to the evil,*” so let us be. As he forgives, let us forgive. As his loving kindness is unwearied, let ours be. As his mercy is unlimited, let ours be unlimited. As his compassions fail not, so let our compassion be unaltered by thanklessness, ingratitude and abuse from those upon whom compassion is bestowed.

## Love's Reward

In verses 35-38 learn, if you have not learned it already, that love is its own reward.

“But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to* the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”

Our Lord Jesus does not here contradict the whole Bible. He is not here telling us that our love to other people earns God's grace, or earns us a place in heaven. Not at all! He is simply declaring that those who are born of God walk in love, and that those who walk in love are born of God. Those who do not are not. Walk in love, *“hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great.”*

The God of all grace has gracious children. The God of all mercy has merciful sons and daughters. The God whose glory it is to forgive sin has a forgiving family. If you are lenient with men, men will be lenient with you. As you forgive men, you shall be forgiven of men. As you give, men will give to you. It is easy to be lenient with lenient people. It is very difficult to be unforgiving toward one who is ever forgiving others. And people are always quickest to give to those who are generous.

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the

propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” (1 John 4:7-11)

# Chapter 35

## Three Great Dangers

Luke 6:39-45

“And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother’s eye. For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:39-45).

In these seven verses our Lord Jesus Christ gives a very sobering, instructive parable, a parable by which he warns all who have ears to hear of three great dangers. Here are three great, spiritual dangers which we must strive to avoid, lest we perish forever.

1. The Danger of Following False Prophets.
2. The Danger of Self-righteousness and Hypocrisy.

### 3. The Danger of a Deceived Heart.

By these three great snares, Satan has carried many to hell. Let us not be numbered among them.

#### Following False Prophets

*First*, the Son of God warns us of the great danger of following false prophets (vv. 39-40).

“And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master” (vv. 39-40).

These two verses are to be understood together. They cannot be separated. Our Lord is telling us plainly that those who follow false prophets shall perish with them in hell. If you follow a blind man, you cannot be walking in the light, and both of you will fall into hell. If you follow Christ, if he who is perfect is your Master, you shall at last be made perfect with him.

While he walked on the earth, our Lord warned us of the great danger of false prophets and false religion more frequently than anything else. The greatest dangers we face, the greatest dangers our children and grandchildren face in this world are not pimps, pushers and pornography (horrible as those things are). Oh, no. Our greatest dangers are false prophets and false religion. If the vices of the world have slain thousands, the pretended virtues of false religion have slain tens of thousands.

This is what our Lord teaches us in these two verses. – If we hear and follow false prophets, we will go to hell with them. If your teacher is in error, you will be in error. If the man who leads you is blind, you are blind. If you follow your blind guide, when he falls into the ditch, so will you.

We constantly endeavor to avoid obvious facts. Pretending to be more kind, gracious and loving than God, we try to convince ourselves that men and women may worship at the altar of free will and still believe free grace, that they may follow blind

guides, though they themselves see, that they may be involved in the practice of false religion and yet know the true God; but those things simply cannot be. Children of the Light walk in the light. Christ's sheep will not follow the voice of a stranger (Matthew 7:13-15; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; 1 John 4:1-3).

Christ is the Door. Every other door is the door to destruction. Christ is the Way. Every other way is the way to hell. Christ is the Truth. Everything else is Satan's lie. Christ is the Life. Everything else is death. Christ is the Altar. Every other altar is idolatry. Christ is the Atonement. Every other attempt to make up with God is a denial of his atonement. Christ is Salvation (Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption). Every thing added to him is damnation.

Beware of false prophets who would take you away from the simplicity that is in Christ. If you care for your soul, if you care for the souls of your sons and daughters, beware of following false prophets. If you do, you will follow them to hell (Revelation 18:4).

## Self-righteousness and Hypocrisy

*Second*, in verses 41 and 42 our Master warns us of the great danger of self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.”

Self-righteousness and hypocrisy always go together. It is impossible to have one without the other. Nothing is more natural to man or more obnoxious to God than self-righteousness and hypocrisy (Isaiah 65:3-5).

I would rather stand before God Almighty in the day of judgment charged with any crime than the crime of self-righteousness. Self-righteous people justify themselves and condemn others. — Those who are made righteous in Christ condemn themselves and justify others. The self-righteous find splinters in the eyes of others and ignore the two-by-fours in their own eyes. — Those who acknowledge and confess their sins before God struggle constantly with the two-by-fours in their own eyes and are not able to see the splinters in the eyes of others. Self-righteous hypocrites boast of their attainments. — Believing sinners grieve over their failures. Self-righteous hypocrites think themselves strong and superior to others. — God’s saints know themselves weak and inferior to their brethren. Self-righteous people, hypocrites go about to establish righteousness. — Believers look to Christ for righteousness (Romans 10:1-4).

## A Deceived Heart

In verses 43-45 our Lord Jesus warns us of the great danger of a deceived heart.

“For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.”

It does not matter how good your religion looks on the outside, “*the Lord looketh on the heart.*” It does not matter how much you impress men, or yourself for that matter, with what you say and do, “*the Lord looketh on the heart.*” It does not matter how sound your doctrine is, “*the Lord looketh on the heart.*” It does not matter how precisely you keep the ordinances, “*the Lord looketh on the heart.*” It does not matter how much money you give, how many chapters you read, how much Scripture you

memorize, how much you pray, or how often you attend church, “*the Lord looketh on the heart.*”

God wants our hearts. God demands our hearts. The root of the matter is the heart. He says, “*My son, give me thine heart.*” If the heart is right, the fruit is good, no matter how bad it looks to men. If the heart is evil, the fruit is evil, no matter how good it looks to men. Perhaps the best way for us to understand the meaning of our Lord’s words here is to hear another parable (Luke 18:9-14).

“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14).

Beware of following false prophets. Beware of self-righteousness and hypocrisy. Beware of a deceived heart. May the God of all grace save us from these three great dangers.

# Chapter 36

## What is your foundation?

Luke 6:46-49

“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great” (Luke 6:46-49).

God saves sinners by free grace alone. We are not saved by what we will, or by what we do. Election is by grace. Redemption is the work of God’s grace. Regeneration is the work of free grace alone. We are kept and preserved in grace by grace alone. The doctrine of Holy Scripture is crystal clear. From start to finish, “*Salvation is of the Lord!*” A spiritually dead sinner has no more to do with the work of the new birth than Lazarus did with his resurrection from the dead.

But that does not mean that sinners are passive in the experience of grace. God does not knock a man in the head and drag him to heaven, whether he wants to go or not. That is not the doctrine of Scripture. God makes his people willing in the day of his power, and graciously causes his chosen to come to Christ willingly (Psalm 65:4; 110:3).

In the passage now before us our Lord Jesus describes two groups of hearers, two kinds of religious people: Those who are saved and those who think they are saved, though they are lost.

True believers, those who have been made wise by grace, are people who do some things, people who, being quickened by his grace, called by his Spirit and drawn with the cords of love, have been made to want Christ and seek him with all their hearts. Therefore, they hear his Word gladly and do his bidding diligently. Digging deep, they have discovered the Foundation. They build upon the Foundation. And having built upon the Foundation, they stand.

The Lord Jesus also describes religious fools in this passage. The religious fool (Matthew 7:26) is one who does not take the things of God seriously. He hears the gospel, just like the wise man does; but everything with him is froth and folly. His religion is all on the surface, superficial and fake. With him, there is no digging, no building and no standing.

The religious fool is one who has made lies his refuge (Isaiah 28:14). They have a house of refuge; but it is a house with no solid foundation, a refuge of lies built upon the shifting sands of human effort, religious works and personal goodness. What is your foundation? Is your soul built upon a foundation of earth and sand, or are you built upon the Rock, Christ Jesus? Saved sinners are built upon and build upon the Foundation God has laid in Zion, Christ Jesus (Isaiah 28:16).

## Christless Religion

Religion without Christ is a very common thing. The visible church has always been a mixed multitude. Tares grow wherever wheat is sown. Goats graze in the same field with sheep. Wherever you find gold, you are sure to find fool's gold. While he walked and preached in this world, the Son of God himself had many followers who were his disciples in word only, many who pretended to honor him by calling him Lord, but were yet rebels and refused to obey him.

This is the evil which our Lord exposes in verse 46. — *“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”* It has always been a painful fact, throughout the history of the church, that multitudes profess faith in Christ who do not know him. Multitudes wear his name and use it who do not follow him (Isaiah 29:13; Ezekiel 33:31; Matthew 15:8-9; James 1:22).

Nothing is more soul numbing, nothing is more dangerous to your soul, nothing is more damning than religion without Christ. Nothing is more likely to keep you from Christ than deluding yourself into thinking you have him when you do not. Nothing in all the world is more treacherous to your soul than a mere form of godliness. Nothing is more likely to keep you from seeking refuge than a refuge of lies (Isaiah 28:14-20).

## True Faith

True faith is an earnest heart pursuit of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who are born of God know their need of Christ and seek him with all their hearts (Jeremiah 29:12-13; Philippians 3:7-14). When a sinner knows his need of Christ, when he is fleeing from the wrath of God, when the gaping jaws of hell are before him, when God fixes it so that he is at his wits end and must either have Christ or die forever, he is in dead earnestness. There is nothing half-hearted, indifferent, or careless about him.

*“Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like”* (v. 47). — Believers are sinners who come to Christ as their Priest, their Savior, trusting him alone for acceptance with God. They are people who hear Christ’s words as their Prophet, as their Teacher. And believers are people who obey Christ as their King, as their Lord and Master.

The Lord Jesus describes the believer as a wise man, who builds his house upon the rock. — *“He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock”* (v. 48). He believes on the Rock. He digs deep, sparing nothing,

refusing to build upon any foundation other than that foundation which God has laid, Christ Jesus (Isaiah 28:16; Romans 9:33; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6).

“My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.”

The house that is built upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, is stable and secure. Floods of heresies, streams of adversity, winds of troubles, temptations and trials beat vehemently upon the house, but cannot shake it! It stands firmly fixed upon the Rock, Christ Jesus.

“He only *is* my rock and my salvation: *he is* my defence; I shall not be moved. In God *is* my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, *and* my refuge, *is* in God. Trust in him at all times; *ye* people, pour out your heart before him: God *is* a refuge for us. Selah.” (Psalms 62:6-8)

“He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, *and* established my goings.” (Psalms 40:2)

## False Faith

False faith is shallow, superficial and unstable. — “But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great” (v. 49). John Gill wrote...

“Such builders, and such a building cannot stand against the violent rain of Satan’s temptations, the floods of the world’s persecutions, the stream and rapid torrent of their own heart’s lusts, nor the blowing winds of heresy and false doctrine, and much less the storms of divine wrath and vengeance. They are in a most dangerous condition; they cannot support themselves; they must fall, and great

will be their fall; their destruction is inevitable, their ruin is irrecoverable.”

The Lord Jesus here describes the religion of the one who merely professes, but does not have faith in him. His religion is a house built upon the shifting sands of the earth. His hope is built upon his poor emotions, his excited experience, his religious learning and knowledge, church tradition, his freewill decision, his self-righteous works or sentiments.

The false refuge house is a house quickly built. It may look very impressive, but when floods of heresies, streams of adversity and winds of troubles, trials and temptations beat upon the house, it falls. It falls because it has no foundation.

“The unprofitable hearer is not cemented to Christ by faith, but laid loose, as it were, upon a sandy foundation, and so slips beside the ground work in foul weather. He is not set into the stock as a scion, but only stuck into the ground as a stake, and is therefore easily pulled up. Whereas the true Christian is knit fast to Christ the Rock by the ligament of a lively faith; and as a lively stone, is built up in a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5), growing up in the mystical body with so much sweetness and evenness, as if the whole temple (like that of Solomon) were but one entire stone. ‘He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit’ (1 Corinthians 6:17).”— *John Trapp*

Christ is the Foundation God has laid. Will you stumble over him, or build upon him? God help you to build on him. May God the Holy Spirit join you to him and build you upon him (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

# Chapter 37

## A Certain Centurion

Luke 7:1-10

“Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick” (Luke 7:1-10).

Here, the Holy Spirit gives us the account of a certain centurion, his remarkable character, his great faith, and the healing of his sick servant, by the mere will of the Lord Jesus Christ. This Roman soldier said to the Lord Jesus, “*I am not worthy that thou*

*shouldest enter under my roof...Neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed."*

## No Discrepancy

If you read Matthew's abbreviated account of this same great miracle, you will see that Matthew described the event as a conversation, which took place between the centurion and the Lord Jesus personally. Here, in Luke's narrative the Holy Spirit tells us plainly that the conversation was between the centurion's friends and the Master, not between the centurion and the Master.

There is no discrepancy, or contradiction between Matthew and Luke. Perhaps, Matthew simply makes the words of the centurion's representatives to be the centurion's own words, which is altogether appropriate (since a representative's words are really the words of the one he represents); or it may be that the centurion first sent messengers to the Master and, afterwards, came to the Lord Jesus himself. Whatever the case may be, both Matthew and Luke wrote their narratives as honest eye witnesses, exactly as God the Holy Spirit directed them.

## The Centurion's Servant

*"Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum"* (v. 1). — When Luke tells us the Lord had ended his sayings, he is referring to the sermon he had just finished preaching (Luke 6:20-49). In that sermon our Master's message had four main points. He taught us three great truths we will be wise to learn and remember.

1. Those who are privileged to suffer for the gospel's sake, those who suffer in this world for Christ's sake are blessed (Luke 6:20-26).
2. Faith in Christ causes men and women to walk in love, love that is kind, generous, and forgiving (Luke 6:27-38).

3. Nothing in all the world is so dangerous to our souls as false religion (Luke 6:39-49). If we follow blind men in spiritual matters, we will perish with them.
4. The primary concern in all things spiritual is the heart. — If the tree is corrupt, the fruit is corrupt, no matter how good it may look to men. — If the tree is good, the fruit is good, no matter how corrupt it may appear to men. Our souls must be built upon that Foundation which God himself has laid (the Lord Jesus Christ), or our house is sure to fall.

When our Lord had finished preaching this sermon, he entered into Capernaum. He had spoken with authority. Now, he comes to Capernaum to display the efficacy of his grace.

Capernaum was exalted, elevated, and blessed above all other places (Matthew 11:23), by virtue of the fact that the Lord Jesus performed more of his miraculous works in Capernaum than anywhere else. He had already healed the nobleman's son there (John 4). In all probability, the centurion had heard about that great work. Perhaps he had witnessed it.

*“And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die”* (v. 2). — Here is a centurion, a Roman soldier, who had the command of a hundred men under his authority. He was a Gentile. He was a soldier. And he was a believer. As John Bunyan put it, “A Roman soldier was the first fruit of the Gentile world.” Here, the Holy Spirit tells us three things about this centurion's servant.

1. This servant was dear (held in great honor and precious) to his master. — Blessed is the servant who has such a master! Words can never speak so powerfully as the experience of this centurion's servant does of the great advantage and blessed privilege of living in the home of one who believes God, walks with Christ, and seeks your soul's everlasting good.
2. This man's servant was sick, very sick. What

multitudes there are in the same condition spiritually as this man was in physically. There is a plague, a death plague in the heart of man. There is a spiritual palsy in the soul (Isaiah 1:5-6; 1 Kings 8:38).

3. The centurion's servant was "*ready to die*," at the very point of death. An immortal soul at the point of death, what a sobering sight! Each time we see one who is sick, or visit one who is dying we ought to be reminded of our own frailty, and ask God to give us the wisdom and grace to set our hearts upon Christ and eternity (Psalm 90:12-16; Colossians 3:1-3).

## He Heard of Jesus

*"And when he heard of Jesus..."* (v. 3) — We are not told how, but somehow this centurion "*heard of Jesus!*" Perhaps he had been present to hear the sermon recorded in chapter 6. Maybe he had heard the report of the gospel from someone else. How he heard is unimportant. What is important is this. — "*He heard of Jesus!*"

God sent his Word to him. God the Holy Spirit had given him hearing ears, seeing eyes and a believing heart. We have no way of knowing how much knowledge the man had. That is altogether insignificant. The thing that is significant is who he knew. He knew the Lord Jesus Christ, and he knew the one true and living God in him (John 17:3).

In other words, he was born of God. The only way any sinner can ever have eternal life is by knowing God (John 17:3). The only way we can know God is in Christ (Matthew 11:27). And the only way any sinner can know Christ and believe on him unto life everlasting is by the preaching of the gospel (Romans 1:16; 10:17).

## The Centurion

“And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue” (vv. 3-5).

This centurion was a man of remarkable character. He was a gracious, kind, generous man. His faith was that true faith which only God can give. It was “*faith that worketh by love.*” He was a man of blameless reputation. He was a man of such magnanimous goodness in the eyes of men that the Jews did not hesitate to declare (though it betrayed their own ignorance) that he was worthy for the Son of God to give him what he asked.

He loved his servant. Many came to the Lord Jesus seeking mercy for others. One came for a son, another for a daughter, and once four for a friend; but we are told of none but this centurion who came to the Son of God seeking mercy for a servant. Not only did he love his servant, he loved his neighbors, too. – “*He loveth our nation.*” And this centurion was devoted to the worship and service of God. He built a synagogue, a house of worship at Capernaum. When these Jewish leaders said, “*He hath built for us a synagogue,*” they were saying, -- This man has, at his own expense, by himself, built a church building and given us a place to worship the Lord our God! This man’s faith was more than creeds, confessions, and rituals. He did not merely say he believed God. He lived as one who believed God. His love was not lip love, but deed love.

Kindness is something all people recognize and appreciate. Kindness adorns and commends the doctrine of God our Savior. Kindness reflects the character of Christ. Kindness is one way to spread a little happiness in this world. Even these wretched Jewish elders (who would soon plot the murder of the Son of God) were moved by this man’s kindness. Had his servant died of his sickness, he would have enjoyed the privilege of dying in the home and under the tender care of a kind friend. — “*Be ye kind*

*one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour"* (Ephesians 4:32-5:1).

“Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed” (vv. 6-7).

This centurion was a truly humble man. Humbled by grace, he sent messengers to the Lord Jesus, saying, *“I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof!”* All who are born of God, all true believers know their unworthiness before God and confess it. Others may look at the child of God and applaud him for his deeds; but he sees himself in another light.

Here is a remarkable expression of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. — *“Say in a word, and my servant shall be healed!”* He acknowledged what very few understood in his day and few understand in any day: — That Jesus of Nazareth is himself God almighty in human flesh. None but God himself can heal by the mere word of his power (Psalms 33:6, 9; 148:5). But there was much more to his faith than the bare acknowledgment of Christ's eternal deity.

“For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it” (v. 8). — This centurion asked for no sign or wonder. He simply believed God. He here declares his implicit confidence in Christ as God and confesses his faith in him as that One in whose hands all things are but clay, the mighty King of the universe, whose command rules in heaven, earth and hell, the Monarch of all things, before whom all things (including sickness and health, life and death) are but obedient servants. He confidently bowed

to the Lord Jesus, confessing his omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence as God. He believed that Man who stood on the sands of Capernaum to be the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth!

## Jesus Marvelled

“When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (v. 9). — Only twice do we see the Lord Jesus marveling at something. In Mark 6:6 we are told that our Savior marveled at the unbelief of his kinsmen. Here, he marvels at the faith of a Roman centurion. What can be more marvelous than the fact that the Son of God marveled?

In Mark 6:6 the word “*marvelled*” implies astonishing sorrow. Here, the same word implies great admiration. Let us learn to place admiration where our Lord did, not upon the gaities of the world sought by men, but upon the grace of God in men. Our Lord Jesus was never impressed by a person’s possessions, position or power, land, learning or living, fortune, fame or family. But he admired faith. What grace this shows in him! — He gives faith, and then admires the man who exercises what he has given!

*“And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick”* (v. 10). — A greater miracle of healing than this is nowhere recorded in Holy Scripture. Without even seeing this centurion’s servant, without so much as the touch of his hand or the look of his eye, our Lord restored the full vigor of health to a dying man! He willed it, and the disease departed!

May God give us grace, like this centurion, to believe him, to love others, to do them good, to seek the grace and mercy of God in Christ for their souls. May the Lord give us grace, like this centurion, to walk humbly before him, knowing and acknowledging to him our utter unworthiness of the very least of his favors.

# Chapter 38

## A Blessed Intrusion

### Luke 7:11-17

“And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare *him* stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about” (Luke 7:11-17).

On three separate occasions our Lord Jesus raised people from the dead, by his great omnipotence and grace. In John 11 he raised Lazarus from the dead, one who had been dead for four days. In the eighth chapter of Luke’s gospel our Savior raised the ruler’s daughter to life. But the first display of our Savior’s power over death is found here in Luke 7:11-17.

We have before us a scene of great sorrow. As our Lord Jesus, his disciples, and the crowds following him came to the city of Nain, they ran into a funeral procession. A widow was taking her only son to the cemetery. When our Lord Jesus came

upon this scene of woe, he stepped into the life of this widow at the time of her greatest sorrow. He intruded when no stranger ought to intrude. He stopped what no one ought to stop. He interrupted a funeral.

Oh, how I thank the Son of God for making such intrusions of grace as are portrayed in this passage! Multitudes are carried swiftly to their graves by the gaities, glamour and glitter of the world, totally unaware of their lost and ruined condition, without feeling, without life, without hope, until the Lord Jesus Christ steps into their lives, stops their funeral processions and raises the dead by the power of his omnipotent grace! And whenever the Son of God intrudes into the lives of men and women in this world, those who experience his intrusion, bow before him in reverent fear and glorify God.

Without question, our Lord's miracles display the fact of his eternal Godhead and omnipotent power; but they are intended to do much more than that. They are all designed to be pictures of his grace and salvation freely bestowed upon and wrought in chosen sinners by his omnipotent grace. This story of the funeral in Nain is designed to display...

## The Consequences of Sin

*First*, the scene before us displays most vividly the consequences of our sin. — “*The wages of sin is death;*” and everything preceding death in this world is but the forerunner of it. All funerals are sad; but here is a picture of sadness without any mixture of pleasure. Here is a widow, burying her young son, who is her only son. Everything in the picture, until the Lord Jesus steps in, is misery, sorrow, grief and woe.

That is exactly the case with us. The corruption, depravity and sin of race are evident because ours is a race of sick, dying, sorrowful men. We live in a world of sickness and sorrow, drudgery and death, wickedness and woe, misery and mortality, because we live in a world of sin. Sin is the root and fountain of all this sorrow. Were it not for sin, the world would be free of tears and cares. Were it not for sin, there would be no sickness,

no doctors, no hospitals, no courts, no prisons, no broken homes, no shattered lives, no morticians, no funerals, no cemeteries. But all these woes portray the present state of things all over the world. What a thief, what a nuisance, what a great murderer sin is (Romans 5:12); but, blessed be God, things change when Christ comes! When the Lord Jesus steps into a sinner's world of woe, all that was misery before is seen to be mercy. And when he comes again, he will make all things new, and remove from his creation all the evil consequences of sin (Revelation 21:1-7).

## The Compassion of Our Savior

*Second*, God the Spirit here gives us a beautiful display of our Savior's compassion. — "*And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not*" (v. 13). Oh, how deep is the compassion of our Savior's heart! None of us has yet begun to imagine how tender and compassionate our Lord Jesus is. He truly is "*touched with the feelings of our infirmities.*" He who wept with Martha and Mary at their brother's tomb is still "*touched with the feelings of our infirmities.*"

Here our Lord Jesus meets the mournful procession. As he observes what has happened and is happening, his heart is moved toward this poor woman. He does not wait for someone to ask for help. He just steps in, in sovereign mercy, and says to the woman, "*Weep not!*"

There is no friend or comforter to be compared with Christ. Perhaps those two words sounded strange to this woman, perhaps even cruel. Certainly, no one in the procession understood them; but, when the Lord Jesus says, "*Weep not,*" he takes away the cause of weeping! In all our days of darkness he is our Light. He is yet the Sun of Righteousness. And the Son of God never changes (Hebrews 13:8). He cannot fail. He cannot disappoint. He cannot change.

Child of God, your dear Redeemer, who made the mourning widow's heart leap for joy, will yet turn your sorrow into laughter and your mourning into a song. He is a Friend who sticks closer than a brother. He lives to heal broken hearts, to mend broken

lives, and wipe away all tears from our eyes; and he will do it.

## The Character of Our Sovereign

*Third*, this story sets before us the character of our Sovereign. Our Lord Jesus stepped in and took over. O blessed intrusion! There are those who say, “God is a gentleman. He never comes in uninvited.” But those who talk such nonsense are as ignorant as they are blasphemous. Thank God, he never waits for permission to intervene. He never waits for an invitation to be gracious. When God comes to save, he comes in sovereign mercy. Our sovereign God always takes the initiative in salvation. He declares, — “*I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me*” (Romans 10:20; Ezekiel 16:6-8)

“And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee *when thou wast* in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee *when thou wast* in thy blood, Live. I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: *thy* breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou *wast* naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time *was* the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine.” (Ezekiel 16:6-8)

## The Conditions of Salvation

*Fourth*, this event was brought to pass by God’s wise, adorable and good providence specifically to show us the conditions of our salvation. The Word of God specifically identifies certain conditions that must be met before any sinner can enter into heavenly glory in everlasting salvation.

1. The Will of God — No sinner will ever be saved except God wills it. Man's will is totally insignificant. Only the will of God matters (John 1:11-13; Romans 9:11-18; John 5:21).
2. The Word of God — God has ordained the salvation of his elect by the preaching of the gospel. As this young man was made to live by the word of Christ, so "*faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23-25).
3. The Work of God — Salvation is a supernatural, irresistible work of God's free and sovereign grace involving three mighty works of omnipotent, effectual mercy, by which the complete redemption (deliverance) of God's elect is accomplished ((1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

All who obtain God's salvation must be ransomed from the curse of the law. That is what the Lord Jesus did for us by the sacrifice of himself at Calvary (Galatians 3:13-14; 1 Peter 1:18-20). But blood atonement alone takes no one to heaven. Every ransomed sinner must be delivered from the prison and grave of sin by the power of God the Holy Spirit in regeneration (John 5:25). None will ever be saved except Christ be formed in them, except they be made new creatures in Christ, except they be born again (John 3:5-7). No one has any hope of glory until he is made a partaker of the divine nature. Yet, there is another work just as necessary as the ransom of our souls by the blood of Christ and just as necessary as the new birth. Every chosen, blood-bought, heaven-born soul must be transformed in resurrection glory into the very likeness of his Savior (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:18-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

# Chapter 39

## The Concern of a Condemned Man

Luke 7:18-22

“And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things. And John calling *unto him* two of his disciples sent *them* to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of *their* infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many *that were* blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached” (Luke 7:18-22).

It is a terribly sad thing to see families divided. It is even sadder to see men and women who are brethren in Christ divided. With families, I suppose, divisions may be, in some circumstances, unavoidable, perhaps even justifiable. But there is absolutely no justification for strife, jealousy, and division among saved sinners. Yet, it is often the sad, shameful fact that men and women who are one in Christ are divided in this world.

There were some of whom Paul spoke when he was in prison at Rome, who, though they were his brethren, thought he was a fake, sought to add affliction to his bonds and were obviously motivated by envy and strife (Philippians 1:12-18). The church at

Corinth was in a horrible state of strife and division when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. In fact, the first three chapters of that Book are taken up with the matter. Yet, they were brethren.

The same thing was true, even during the days of our Lord's earthly ministry. Our Lord's disciples were once divided about the matter of who would be greatest among them in heaven. And there was a sad, but obvious, jealousy between the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of our Lord.

We see this in the opening words of the passage before us. Our Lord had performed remarkable miracles; and his fame was immediate. In verse 16 we read, "*There came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and that God hath visited his people.*" Then, in verse 18 we read, "*And the disciples of John showed him all these things.*" John's disciples were concerned that their beloved leader was losing fame and influence. They were a little put out by the increased fame of Jesus of Nazareth. But John the Baptist was a truly magnanimous man, faithful in all things to the glory of Christ and the souls of men. He is held before us here in his very last recorded act on this earth as an example for us to follow.

## A Faithful Watchman

"And the disciples of John showed him of all these things. And John calling *unto him* two of his disciples sent *them* to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" (vv. 18-20)

The message John sent to the Lord Jesus was not an indication of doubt or unbelief on his part. This is the man who had throughout his adult life pointed sinners to Christ and proclaimed him as the Lamb of God, that One whose shoes he was not worthy to untie, the man who was and is the eternal God. He was not now in doubt about those things. He had been taught of God.

The message John sent to the Master was intended to confirm

his disciples in the faith and persuade them to follow Christ, whom he followed. It was to set the hearts of his disciples, those very disciples who seemed fearful that the Lord Jesus might be getting too much attention, on the Savior.

John knew that he was a condemned man. Herod had thrown him into prison. His life was coming to an end. His opportunities of service in the cause of Christ were now ended. His day of labor was over. The prospects before him were obvious. Yet, even in the prospect of his violent death, John was a faithful man, faithful to his God, faithful to his Savior, faithful to his charge as God's prophet and faithful to the souls committed to his trust. This faithful man sent his disciples to the Lord Jesus, that they might see for themselves who he was. This was the concern of his heart, even when he was himself a condemned man.

This was not just John's concern in the prospect of death. He was not trying, in his last days, to make up for past inconsistencies. Not at all. This was John's constant concern (John 1:19-29, 35-37; 3:22-36). It is ever the concern of faithful men to exalt Christ, point sinners to Christ, and urge those under their influence to believe and to follow Christ.

Like Paul after him, John the Baptist sought to unify God's people, by directing the hearts of those who heard him to Christ himself. With great wisdom and forethought, he sent his disciples directly to the Lord Jesus, asking, "*Art thou he that should come? Or, look we for another?*" He was keenly aware of the fact that his disciples might easily be led away by the petty strife that often divides men. He did what he could to head it off before he left his friends. Like his Master, he loved his disciples to the end.

What an instructive example John's action here gives us. Every pastor, every father, everyone who has influence over another ought to make it their business in life to direct those they influence to Christ. Let it be our hearts' concern to set the hearts of those we influence upon the Son of God (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1).

Spare no pains to instruct those trusted to your influence in the things of God. Press them into the Savior's arms. Remind them often of their sins and his sacrifice, of their souls and his

salvation, of their guilt and his grace, of their ruin and his redemption! Blessed are those men and women, mothers and fathers, pastors and elders who can on their dying beds look back upon the faces of those they leave behind, and say, "I've warned you of the wrath to come. I've told you, as best I could, who Christ is. I have not failed to show you the way of life and press you into it.

## A Forceful Witness

"And in that same hour he cured many of *their* infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many *that were* blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached" (vv. 21-22).

What a remarkable answer our Lord gave to these disciples of John. How would he convince them who he is? He offered no historic proof. He gave them no account of what other men had said about him. He simply pointed them to the facts. — The works they saw and the doctrine they heard. That which they saw and heard convinced them that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ promised by God's prophets (Isaiah 35:4-6).

Wherever Christ is the blind are made to see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor (spiritually and materially) have the gospel preached to them.

We would be wise to hear the instruction of our Lord's example. By what standard are we to judge the ministry of any man, or any church? How are we to witness to men? How are we to convince others of the gospel we believe? Argument, debate and apologetics are useless. Creeds, confessions, and historic positions are meaningless. Just tell others what you have seen and heard, what you have experienced, observed, and learned for yourself (1 John 1:1-3).

## A Frank Warning

*“And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me”* (v. 23). John’s disciples saw standing before them a man, to all outward appearance, as poor, unimpressive and needy as they were. His followers were a rag-tag band of fishermen. The only men of means among them were publicans, men of notorious ill-repute. It seemed incredible that this man could be the Christ, the Son of the living God. Multitudes have gone to hell because they found him an offense (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). Will you?

The offence of the cross has not ceased (Galatians 5:11). So long as the world stands, Christ and his gospel will be offensive to proud, self-righteous men. It is offensive to man’s sense of self-worth to be told that he is a poor, lost, guilty, condemned sinner. It is offensive to our pride to be told that we are utterly helpless, incapable of saving ourselves or even contributing something to our salvation. It is offensive to self-righteous men to be told that they must be justified by the righteousness of another, washed in the blood of a Substitute and saved by free grace alone. It is offensive to our sense of dignity and superiority to be told that we must enter the kingdom of heaven side by side with publicans, harlots and sinners. It is offensive to our sense of personal intelligence to be told that salvation, the knowledge of Christ and of God, comes to men entirely by divine revelation. It is offensive to our sense of self-determination to be told that salvation is by God’s will and not by our own. It is offensive to our rebel hearts to be told that we must bow to the rule and dominion of Christ as our rightful Sovereign, Lord, and King.

Untold thousands have heard the gospel and, being offended by it, have despised it. They would not stoop to *“enter in at the strait gate.”* They would not bow to walk in *“the narrow way.”* They despised God’s terms of grace. Therefore, they are this hour in hell, tormented by the just wrath of the holy Lord God. They now know the meaning of these words — *“Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”*

# Chapter 40

## Our Great Defender

Luke 7:24-30

“And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings’ courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. And all the people that heard *him*, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him” (Luke 7:24-30).

Did you ever notice how often the Scriptures portray the Lord our God as our Shield and Defense? Particularly in the Psalms, we see our great God spoken of in this way. How often we see the man after God’s own heart running to him for defense, hiding in him for refuge, seeking protection behind the mighty God of Jacob as his shield. David’s son, Solomon, learned this valuable, soul cheering truth from his father (Psalms 119:114; 144:1-2; Proverbs 18:10; 30:5). He who is our shield and hiding place is our Defender. The psalmist sang with joy, — “*God is my Defence!*” (Psalms 7:10; 31:2; 89:18; 94:22). The Lord Jesus

Christ, our great God and Savior, is the great Defender of our souls.

“Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him *cometh* my salvation. He only *is* my rock and my salvation; *he is* my defence; I shall not be greatly moved. How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall *shall ye be, and as* a tottering fence. They only consult to cast *him* down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah. My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation *is* from him. He only *is* my rock and my salvation: *he is* my defence; I shall not be moved. In God *is* my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, *and* my refuge, *is* in God. Trust in him at all times; *ye* people, pour out your heart before him: God *is* a refuge for us. Selah.” (Psalms 62:1-8)

## Christ our Defender

In the passage before us God the Holy Spirit holds before us an instructive example of Christ our God defending one of his own. That is what we see in verses 24-28. Our Lord seems to have sensed that those who had heard his conversation with John’s disciples might, as sinful men are prone to do, put a bad construction upon what they had heard. He seems to have read the thoughts of their hearts, and what he read was not good. Perhaps the fact that John was imprisoned by Herod caused the multitudes to look upon him with suspicion. Perhaps the question he sent his disciples to ask caused those who heard it to look upon John as a weak, fluctuating, unsteady man, one whose faith had begun to fail. Whatever their thoughts were, they were obviously thoughts of unwarranted unkindness, harshness and evil regarding John the Baptist.

Whatever the reason was, our Lord Jesus immediately took up John’s cause. Without a moment’s hesitation, like a faithful friend, the Son of God takes upon himself the defense of his faithful servant. There is much to be learned here. Blessed are

those who have Christ for their Friend; and blessed are those who follow his example as friends to others (Proverbs 17:17; 18:24).

The Lord Jesus pleaded John's cause earnestly, with the strong, firm, unquestionable language of a loyal, faithful friend. He took it upon himself to silence the suspicious thoughts and doubts in the minds of those around him about John. He said that John was no mere reed, shaken in the wind. He was not a man of unstable, wavering character, but a prophet, a great prophet. He asserted that John was not a man living in luxury, courting the favor of men, particularly of powerful men. He did not hang around the king's palace, groveling for the king's smile. John was God's prophet; and he acted like God's prophet.

Indeed, John the Baptist was much more than a prophet. He was a prophet of whom the prophet Malachi wrote (Malachi 3:1), "*Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*" John was that Elijah who came to prepare the way for the Christ, who came to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children by turning their hearts to Christ. Then, our Master said, "*Among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.*"

What a blessed picture we have before us! I find it sweet beyond expression, touching and instructive. Just a few years earlier, John was the best known, most popular, most highly esteemed preacher in the land. There was a time when all Jerusalem and Judea hung upon his words. They followed him from one place to another, walking for miles at a time, just to hear him preach. All men were baptized by him (Matthew 3:5). But now John the Baptist was a prisoner in Herod's hands, deserted by all, held in contempt by all but a few, friendless and alone. The only thing awaiting him was his execution. But he was not deserted by that One whose name is the Mighty God. John could say of him what all who ever knew him could, "*This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend.*"

"Jesus! What a Friend for sinners! Jesus! Lover of my soul!

Friends may fail me, foes assail me, He my Savior, makes me whole.

Jesus! What a Strength in weakness! Let me hide myself  
in Him;  
Tempted, tried, and sometimes failing, He, my Strength,  
my victory wins.

Jesus! What a Help in sorrow! While the billows o'er me  
roll;  
Even when my heart is breaking, He, my Comfort, helps  
my soul!

Jesus! What a Guide and Keeper! While the tempest still  
is high;  
Storms about me, night o'ertakes me, He, my Pilot, hears  
my cry!

Jesus! I now flee unto Him! More than all in Him I find;  
He has granted me forgiveness. — I am His and He is  
mine!

Hallelujah! What a Savior! Hallelujah! What a Friend!  
Saving, helping, keeping, loving, He is with me to the  
end!"

John the Baptist had in the Son of God a Friend who never  
failed him and never forsook him. He is that Friend who says to  
all his Jacob's, "*I am the Lord, I change not. — I will never leave  
thee, nor forsake thee*"

Let me show you what there is in all this for you. — Do you  
know what it is to be held in suspicion? Do you know what it is  
to be slandered, falsely accused, to have your name evil spoken  
of, to have your character assaulted? There are few of God's  
children in this world who do not experience these things.

Noah's son Ham sought to mar his father's name among his  
own brothers. Moses was the object of much slander in Pharaoh's  
house; but the slander in the house of Israel was more bitter; and  
the suspicions of Miriam and Aaron were even worse. Joseph's  
brethren spoke evil of him. David was maligned by Saul,

betrayed by Ahithophel, and cursed by Simeon. Jeremiah was falsely accused by those for whom he labored, to whom he carried the burden of the Word of the Lord. John the Baptist was praised as a great prophet one day and accused of being possessed of the devil the next. Our Lord himself was slandered, maligned, falsely accused, betrayed and looked upon by the multitudes, those who would not hear him, as a vile, reprehensible man, a glutton, a drunk, and the constant companion of sinners. The women who anointed the Savior had their motives suspected and were slandered, even by their fellow disciples. Paul was accused of being a self-serving false prophet, a promoter of licentiousness, and a wicked man.

These things are not easy to bear. In fact, there are few trials more difficult to endure. The fiend of hell is called "*the accuser of the brethren*" (at least in part), because false accusation is that which he most often uses as a weapon against our souls. Satan knows that a man's character is the point at which he is most easily, most painfully, and most permanently wounded. He knows that men and women who seek to honor God are most sensitive about maintaining an honorable name, seeking to live blamelessly before others. Therefore, he most often assaults us there.

J. C. Ryle wrote, "Slanders are easily called into existence, greedily received and propagated, and seldom entirely silenced." Lies and false accusations are the devil's chosen weapons, by which he tries to injure the Lord's people, seeks to destroy a person's usefulness and disturbs our peace.

Knowing these things, by bitter and painful experience, there is nothing more comforting and assuring than this: -- We have an Advocate in heaven who knows our sorrow and is touched by that which touches us. That same Advocate who took up the cause of John the Baptist before this Jewish crowd is our Advocate today. The Son of God will never desert his own. Our names may be cast in the mud and evil spoken of by wicked men. The world may frown upon us. But our Savior never changes. He has undertaken our cause. He will protect and defend us in the best way. And, one day soon, he will plead our cause before the

entire world (1 Corinthians 4:3-5).

## Peculiar Blessedness

In verse 28 the Lord Jesus tells us that we live in an age of peculiar blessedness. — “For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” The last phrase of this verse has been interpreted by faithful men in a variety of ways. — “But he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

Without question, these words apply to our Lord himself. The Son of God became the least among men, the very least in the kingdom of God, though he is greater than all. — “*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich*” (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:5-11). He who is God over all and blessed forever became a man. He who created all things became the Servant of men. He who is our Lord and Master washed his disciples’ feet. He who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He who is life was made to die the painful, shameful, ignominious death of the cross, that we might have eternal life in him!

However, our Lord is here talking about his disciples in this gospel age. These words speak of the peculiar, distinctive privilege that is ours as the children of God in this gospel age. — “*He that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*” Compared with the saints of the Old Testament era, believers in this gospel age enjoy a position of tremendous advantage and superiority. After describing and highly commending John’s gifts and graces, the Savior says, “*but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*”

He is not suggesting that believers in this age are superior to those of the Old Testament in gifts, in faith or in faithfulness. If we had no other passage than Hebrews 11 to convince us, Hebrews 11 is enough to convince us that our Lord is not

suggesting that believers in this age are superior to those of the Old Testament in gifts, in faith or in faithfulness.

What he is saying is this: — In this gospel age believers have superior light and revelation. We have the full, final, complete revelation of God in Christ inscripturated (Hebrews 1:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21). Living on this side of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ we live in a position of indescribably greater light than John the Baptist and those who lived in that age of types, pictures and prophecy.

I do not suggest that those believers of old did not know and believe the same gospel we do. They most certainly did. But they saw things as through a glass darkly. They were not given such a precise, exact and complete revelation of gospel truth as we now have in the full revelation of God. — They saw the Fountain. We see the Fountain opened. — They saw the veil. We see the veil rent in twain and the way to the holiest of all open. — Priscilla and Aquilla took Appollos home and instructed that great orator in the way of the Lord more perfectly.

This is exactly what God promised in the covenant. — *“They all shall know me...A child shall lead them!”* To put it in plain, simple terms, in so far as spiritual knowledge is concerned, the new born babe in this gospel age, knowing the wondrous doctrine of the cross, being taught of God, has greater spiritual knowledge than John the Baptist and those men and women of the Old Testament possessed. The Old Testament age was the church’s age of infancy and childhood. This is the age of the church’s maturity. The law was our schoolmaster unto Christ. But now that Christ has come we are no longer under a schoolmaster (Ephesians 3:1-11; Colossians 1:25-27; 1 Peter 1:10-17).

## A Solemn Lesson

In verses 29-30 the Spirit of God sets before us a very solemn lesson. — All who are privileged to hear the gospel either justify God or reject the counsel of God against themselves.

“And all the people that heard *him*, and the publicans,

justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.”

To some the gospel is made of God to be the sweet savor of life and salvation. Being born of the Spirit, convinced of our guilt and sin, looking to Christ, all true believers justify God (Psalm 51:1-5). Self-righteous rebels reject, despise and cast off the counsel of God against themselves (Proverbs 1:23-33; Isaiah 65:1-5; 66:1-2).

# Chapter 41

## “Wisdom Justified”

Luke 7:31-35

“And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children” (Luke 7:31-35)

### This Generation

First our Lord speaks about a group of people called, “*this generation.*” At first glance, it looks as though he is using the word “*generation*” the way we commonly use it, to speak of that specific group of people living at the time. But that clearly is not the case. If you look through the Scriptures, every time these words are used together, they are used to describe self-righteous religionists. They always refer to lost religious people, like the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians of our Lord’s day. And those people called “*this generation*” are always hostile, persecuting people. They are the people of whom our Lord spoke specifically when he said, “*In the world you shall have tribulation.*” The words “*this generation*” speak of the enemies of

our God and of our souls in every age (Psalms 12:1-8; 71:12-18; Matthew 12:41-42; 23:29-38).

In Luke 7:31-34 the Lord Jesus shows us that unbelieving religionists are always opposed to, find fault with, and are quick to slander God's servants and his people, because the carnal mind is enmity against God.

We ought to always take care not to offend the people of this world. We should always strive to be kind, gracious, thoughtful, and caring of those people among whom we live and with whom we work in this world. As much as possible, live peaceably with all men. Try to get along with people. Make sacrifices to do so. Endeavor to live blamelessly before your neighbors, for Christ's sake, for the honor of God, for the gospel's sake. Yet, we must not concern ourselves with the cavils of men. If men and women are determined to set themselves in opposition to us, as we endeavor to serve our God, they should not disturb us. We must not court the favor of men; and we must not fear the frowns of men. "*This generation*" is a hard, implacable, peevish, childish generation, which will never be made friends to the cause of Christ. The cross of Christ has always been an offense to them and always will be.

This is the lesson to be learned by our Lord's comparison describing "*this generation*" as children. If we would be saved, we must become as little children, meek, humble, inoffensive, trusting. Yet, lost religionists are also like little children, not adorable, sweet children, but peevish brats. Our Master compares "*this generation*" to perverse, rebellious children, who can never be pleased with anything. Nothing satisfies them. Nothing contents them. They find some fault with everything and everyone, but themselves.

John the Baptist came, leading a stern, austere, separated life of self-denial; and they said, "*He hath a devil.*" After him, the Lord Jesus came adopting the habits of a more social man, a man who mixed with people; and the very same men of "*this generation*" said of him, he is "*a glutton and a winebibber.*"

Their animosity was not really against either John or Jesus of

Nazareth as men, or as preachers, but against the message they preached, the doctrine they taught, the God they represented. The men and women of "*this generation*" really do not care at all what kind of man the preacher really is. They know they can make their kind of preachers become whatever they want them to be.

John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ preached exactly the same thing. Both preached repentance toward God and faith in Christ. But the men and women of "*this generation*" are determined not to hear God's Word, bow to his Son, confess their sin and seek salvation by free grace alone. The fact is, "*the carnal mind is enmity against God.*" Nothing will ever change that, but grace itself.

The pretended objections of this generation to God's servants are only a smoke screen to cover their rebellion and hatred of God. Anyone who would hear God's message from the lips of the Master would also gladly hear it from John's lips. And any who would hear God's message from the lips of John the Baptist would gladly hear it from the lips of the Lord Jesus.

How often we see religious men and women who have a blind attachment to a preacher! They follow not the Shepherd's voice through the preacher, but the preacher's voice. Such people are always fickle and unstable. And rebels will always find an excuse for their rebellion. The carnal mind will always attempt to cover its hatred of God and justify its unbelief. For proud, self-righteous, self-willed religious men and women, no matter who the preacher is, free grace is too easy, faith in Christ is too simple, substitution is too dangerous.

Notice this, too. — Most of those things which divide the unbelieving religious world are matters of complete insignificance and indifference. What was it that caused these people to talk? What was it that kept some from hearing John and others from hearing the Lord Jesus and all of them from hearing either? — John the Baptist was a strict separatist, a Nazarite. — The Lord Jesus was far more free in his conduct.

Let us not behave as such peevish, silly children. Rather, let

us ever behave as mature men and women. We have no right to make indifferent matters of importance. Let us learn to be silent about all those things about which the Book of God is silent. We have no right to impose rules upon God's people that God never imposed. And we dare not make essential matters of indifference. — The gospel of Christ, believer's immersion, the observance of Lord's Supper are matters of primary importance. The doctrine of the gospel, (righteousness by the obedience of Christ, redemption by his effectual blood atonement, salvation by the irresistible gift and operation of grace) cannot be compromised; and these things are held forth perpetually in the symbolic ordinances of the gospel, when those ordinances are observed as our Lord gave them.

This generation is a wicked, perverse generation. But our Lord also speaks of...

### Another Generation

There is another generation, called "*his generation*," "*the generation of thy children*," "*the generation of the upright*," and "*a chosen generation*." Look at verse 35. Here our Master draws a direct and distinct contrast between those of "*this generation*" and his own elect. — "*But wisdom is justified of all her children*."

Certainly there is at least a reference here to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who is our Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30). Christ is the wisdom of God. He is the Word, that One in whom and by whom we know God. He lived in wisdom here and shows us the way of wisdom. The Lord Jesus stood for us as our Wisdom in the counsel chambers of the Almighty in eternity. He fulfilled the wisdom of the covenant. He makes believing sinners wise unto salvation. And he gives us wisdom as we need it in the face of our numerous, subtle foes.

All God's elect justify him in all his person and work. — "*Wisdom is justified of ALL her children*." All who are born of

God, born of wisdom, repent before him and thereby justify God (Psalm 51:4). Repentance is taking sides with God against ourselves, coming into agreement with God, and justifying God in the way he saves sinners.

Yet, there is more. Believer's justify God's wisdom in all things and thereby prove themselves wise indeed. The Scriptures make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ (2 Timothy 3:15). And God the Holy Spirit is in his people the Spirit of Wisdom, Revelation and Grace. Thus, we are taught and enabled to see the justice and equity of our God in all his works and in all his ways (Psalms 36:6; 48:11; 97:8; 119:75; Isaiah 26:8-9; Revelation 19:1-6).

### **A Great Savior!**

Even when he is spoken of in derision, our Lord Jesus Christ proves himself to be a great Savior. His enemies constantly derided him, calling him "*a friend of publicans and sinners.*" How I rejoice to declare that that is exactly who and what the Lord Jesus Christ is. In fact, he is the only friend of Publicans and sinners, the only friend we have; and he is the Friend only of Publicans and sinners (Matthew 9:12-13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31-32).

Oh, how willing God is to be gracious! Did you ever notice how often the Lord God refers to our sins as sicknesses, diseases and infirmities? One reason for that is this: — Our heavenly Father views the sins of his people as sicknesses calling for pity, not as crimes calling for punishment!

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded,  
sick and sore.

Come, ye weary, heavy-laden, lost and ruined by the fall.

Come, ye sinners, come and welcome, God's free bounty  
glorify!

True belief and true repentance, every grace that brings us  
nigh!

# Chapter 42

## A Woman Who Was A Sinner

Luke 7:36-50

“And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind *him* weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe *them* with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed *them* with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw *it*, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman *this is* that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that *he*, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he

said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace”  
(Luke 7:36-50).

It would not be possible for us to conceive of two people more completely opposite to one another than Simon the Pharisee and this woman who was a sinner. Without question, there are many good, profitable lessons which may be gleaned from this passage of Scripture. We would be wise to lay them to heart. May God the Holy Spirit, who caused these words to be written, write the lessons of this passage on our hearts.

### **A Form of Godliness**

Many, like this proud Pharisee, have a form of godliness, who know nothing of God’s saving grace in Christ. Simon showed much outward respect for the Lord Jesus and his disciples. What could be more respectful? He had a large, extravagant dinner party in honor of our Savior. Yet, he was utterly ignorant of Christ, his gospel and the grace of God. He had a form of godliness, but knew nothing of God’s saving power and grace. His proud heart was repulsed by the sight of this unnamed woman, who was a notorious sinner, entering his house and being so readily and openly received by the Son of God. He, like most religious people, talked about grace and forgiveness, but never experienced it. This proud Pharisee could not stomach the idea that he must enter into the kingdom of heaven upon the same ground and side by side with this wretched sinner. He was religious, but lost. He knew his doctrine, but not God. He was respectable, but not gracious. Do not be satisfied with religion. We must have Christ!

### **Sin a Debt**

Learn this, too. Sin has made us all debtors, owing a debt we can never pay. By reason of our sin, we are all head over heels in debt to the law and justice of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our great Savior, stepped in, paid our debt; and God, for Christ’s sake, has freely and fully forgiven us our debt! The

forgiveness of sins is an act of strict, unbending justice. Yet, in our experience of it, it is a matter of absolute freeness, an act of grace, pure, free grace. Christ paid our debt; and upon the ground of justice satisfied, we are freely forgiven all our sins.

## **Our Motivation**

The third lesson that is obvious in this portion of Scripture is the fact that the great mainspring and driving force of service to Christ is that love and gratitude which arises from a sense of great forgiveness.

How I wish I could drive this point home to the hearts of all who attempt to rouse men and women up to live for and serve Christ. The mainspring and driving force of true Christianity, the motive and inspiration for all devotion and service to Christ, that which compels and constrains believers to live in this world for the glory of God is grace experienced, forgiveness known and felt in the very soul of a man, and the deep gratitude to and love for Christ which arises from the experience of God's free, sovereign, saving grace in our Savior. — Believers are motivated by grace, gratitude and love, not by the threat of law, the promise of reward, or the hope of recognition (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 8:9).

## **Who was this woman?**

This woman, who was a sinner, is here held before us in the Book of God as an example for all who would honor Christ to follow. Yet, wisely and graciously, the Holy Spirit tells us absolutely nothing about this woman except these things. — She was a sinner. — She was a sinner who trusted Christ. — She was a forgiven sinner, forgiven of all her sins. — She was a grateful sinner. — She was a sinner who loved Christ much.

## What did this woman do?

“Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment and stood at his feet behind *him* weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe *them* with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed *them* with the ointment” (vv. 37-38).

This saved sinner made it her business to know where the Savior was and came to him there. She brought with her an alabaster box of ointment. She came with a sacrifice of faith, with which she sought to honor her Redeemer. She stood in humiliation at the Savior’s feet, behind him. She wept. She wept because she was full of sorrow, knowing that the Lord Jesus must suffer and die upon the cursed tree to put away her sin. She wept with loving gratitude because of his great love for her soul. She washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. She tenderly kissed the Savior’s feet, with lips of love, devotion and adoration. She anointed his feet in faith in anticipation of his death. In a word, as the Lord Jesus himself put it, she did what she could (Mark 14:3-9). Blessed are they to whom God the Holy Spirit gives such grace!

## What was her motive?

Why did this woman do what she did? How can such an act be explained? What would inspire a poor person to make such a great, extravagant (in the eyes of men) sacrifice? She had owed much. She had been forgiven much. And she loved much.

## What was the result of this woman’s love for Christ and her devotion and service to him?

She was scorned by Simon the Pharisee, ridiculed by Judas and misunderstood by her fellow disciples. Few there are who

understand devotion, whole-hearted devotion to Christ. But she had not come to Simon's house to be honored. She had come there to honor God her Savior; and honoring him, she was honored by him (1 Samuel 2:30).

This one who honored her Lord was highly honored by her Lord. When she was ridiculed and scorned, the Son of God came to her defense (v. 47). He said, "*Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me*" (Mark 14:6). The Master assured her, before her judges and slanderers, that he had forgiven her of all her sins. -- "*Thy sins are forgiven*" (v. 48). Then her Savior assured her of her faith and spoke peace to her heart (v. 50).

The only way to inspire consecration and devotion to Christ is to preach Christ. The only way to promote good works is to preach free grace (Titus 3:4-9). The soul that has experienced the redemption, forgiveness and saving grace is inspired by the knowledge of God's mercy, love and grace in Christ to love him and seek his glory. — "*We love him, because he first loved us*" (1 John 4:19).

Let all who read this portion of Holy Scripture be reminded and tell sinners everywhere that the Lord Jesus Christ is a great Savior, merciful, gracious, compassionate and able and ready to save the very chief of sinners.

"Sinners Jesus will receive! —  
Sound this word of grace to all,  
Who the heavenly pathway leave,  
All who linger all who fall!

Come, and He will give you rest;  
Trust Him, for His Word is plain;  
He will take the sinfulest;  
Christ receiveth sinful men.

Now my heart condemns me not,  
Pure before the law I stand;  
He who cleansed me from all spot,  
Satisfied its last demand.

Christ receiveth sinful men,  
Even me with all my sin;  
Purged from every spot and stain,  
Heaven with Him I enter in.”

# Chapter 43

## “The Glad Tidings of the Kingdom”

### Luke 8:1-3

“And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve *were* with him, And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance” (Luke 8:1-3).

*“And it came to pass afterward”* — After our Lord had healed the centurion’s servant at Capernaum, after he had raised a widow’s son from the dead in Nain, after he had shown John the Baptist’s disciples who he was, after he had vindicated John in their presence and had sent them back to John and after he had in the house of Simon the Pharisee been honored by the faith of a forgiven sinner and had honored her, then we read that our Savior *“went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.”*

### Our Master.

First, the Holy Spirit directs our attention to our Master, the Lord Jesus. “And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.” Here our Savior sets before us a

tremendous example of diligence and faithfulness as Jehovah's righteous Servant.

Let us never forget that our Lord's obedience to God as a man, his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, was not only a substitutionary obedience, but also an exemplary obedience. Not only did he redeem us with his blood, our Lord Jesus Christ showed us how we ought to live in this world as the servants and children of God (John 13:13-15; 1 Peter 2:21-25).

Our Master was tireless in his labors, unwearied in doing good and constant in redeeming the time he had in this world. Man's unbelief did not stop him from preaching the glad tidings of the gospel. The slanders of his enemies, the reproaches heaped upon him, the scorn of the religious world and the laughter of his deriders did not in any way affect his labor. He always knew who he was, why he was here and what he was to do. He was always about his Father's business. His earthly ministry lasted only three short years. Yet, in those three years our Lord Jesus Christ did more, preached more and ministered more to the needs of others than any man before or since has done in a lifetime.

Let us follow his example. Without question, we will miss the mark and will be constantly aware that we are missing the mark. But let us follow his example and walk in his steps. — "*He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked*" (1 John 2:6). We ought to try to leave our little corner of the world better than we found it. We ought to make it the business of our lives to do good to men and for men. May God give me grace to lay aside my own desires, pleasures and passions, my pride, self-serving and greed, and enable to live to do good to those whose lives I touch.

Time is short; but much can be done in the short time we have. Let us arrange our affairs wisely and we will be amazed how much can be done in a short time. Few have any idea how much can be accomplished in eight, or ten, or twelve hours, if they simply stay at it and avoid idleness and frivolity. Let us "*redeem the time*" for Christ's sake.

Yes, time is short; but this is the only time we have to do the

work God has given us to do in this world. Yes, we will serve him perfectly in the world to come; but in that world there will be no feet to wash. There will be none who are ignorant and need instruction, — none who are hungry and need feeding, none who are sick and need visiting, — none who are mourning and need comforting, — none who are alone and need a friend, — none in spiritual darkness who need enlightening, — none who are fearful and need assurance, — none who are in distress and need relief. Whatever work we do of this kind must be done on this side of the grave. Let us awake to a sense of our responsibility. Souls are perishing and time is flying. Let us resolve, by God's grace, to do something for God's glory before we die.

Luke tells us that our Lord Jesus “*went throughout every city and village preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.*” — There are many, many good and noble works to be done for men. We must never seek to hypocritically excuse ourselves from serving the physical needs of those around us, pretending that we have a higher service to their souls. Rather, while doing what we can to relieve men and women of physical, mental and emotional anguish, let us never forget that we do have a far higher, far more important service to perform for their souls. Like our Master, our primary business in life, our primary function as a local church and our primary purpose of existence is to preach the gospel everywhere, showing this generation “*the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.*”

We have done men and women no good, but positive harm, if we teach them how to live, but do not show them the way of life! We do not serve men and women for good, if we comfort them without directing them to the consolation that is in Christ. We do not minister to our neighbors if we feed them, but do not teach them to eat of the Bread of Life and drink from the Fountain of the Water of Life.

We do not have to guess what Luke meant when he told us that our Master went everywhere preaching “*the glad tidings of the kingdom.*” The context tells us. In the parable of the sower (vv. 5-18), in the calming of the sea (vv. 19-25), in the salvation of the Gadarene (vv. 26-40), in the healing of the woman with the

issue of blood (vv. 41-49), and in the raising of Jairus's daughter (vv. 49-56), our Lord Jesus both displayed and proclaimed the glad tidings of the kingdom.

In the parable of the sower he shows us that faith is the gift of grace, — that salvation comes by divine revelation, — that the sinner must be given a new heart by grace to receive the word of grace. In the calming of the storm our Lord shows us that he is the Sovereign God, ruling all things absolutely. — Not only is he the God who gives us grace and faith, he is the God who keeps us in grace and faith. In the healing of the Gadarene our Savior marvelously displays the experience of salvation in the life of a man unfit for human society. In the healing of the woman with the issue of blood our Lord graciously shows us the desperation and confidence, as well as the power of God given faith. And in the raising of Jairus's daughter the Son of God shows us the glad tidings of the new birth. — It is the work of God wrought in, for, and upon a dead sinner! That is how Luke was inspired to describe our Master.

### His Disciples.

Next, Luke was inspired by the Spirit of God to tell us something about the Lord's disciples. — "*And the twelve were with him.*" These men made it their business to be with him. They left all and followed him. For three and a half years, they were with him. They followed him everywhere. They attended him constantly. They watched him, listened to him and walked with him. Why? They saw him to be everything they wanted or needed. They loved him. They wanted to see him work. They wanted to learn of him. Therefore, "*the twelve were with him.*" — "*These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb*" (Revelation 14:4).

### Certain Women.

Next, Luke was inspired to tell us about some women who had

experienced the power and grace of God by Christ Jesus. — “And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.”

Who were these women? They were women who had experienced the power, mercy and grace of God in Christ. The Lord had healed them of evil spirits and great infirmities. They were women, like the one mentioned at the end of chapter seven, full of gratitude and love for Christ.

Can you imagine what peculiar hardships and trials these women endured for the Master? In those days women stayed at home, kept their mouths shut, and were seen in public only with their husbands, and when their husbands said it was permissible. Women seen in the company of another man in public, let alone in private, were looked upon not with suspicion, but as being, beyond doubt, women without character. Grateful for the mercy and grace they had received and experienced, these women gladly suffered whatever was heaped upon them that they might follow their Savior. Strengthened by the power of his grace, they clung to him to the very end.

It was not a woman’s kiss that betrayed him. It was not these women who forsook him in the Garden. It was not one of these women who denied him. These women stayed with the Savior, weeping as he was led forth to be crucified. It was a few women, not men, who stood by the suffering Lamb of God unto the end. These women were the first at the tomb and the first to see the Lord of Glory on the resurrection morning.

Who were these women? Just three of them are named. The first one named is Mary Magdalene, out of whom the Lord Jesus had cast seven devils (Mark 16:9). The second is “*Joana the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward.*”

When I read that description of Sister Joana, I have to ask, “Why did Luke write that?” This woman’s husband was no ordinary Joe. When Luke tells us that he was “*Herod’s steward,*”

the word “*steward*” does not mean “lackey.” It means that this man Chuza was the man to whom Herod the Tetrarch entrusted the care of his entire house. Chuza was a wealthy, powerful, influential man. It is true, not many mighty, not many noble, not many wealthy are called, but some are. — Not all of our Lord’s followers were poor fishermen. — Perhaps, in God’s wise and good providence, it was for the salvation of God’s elect, our sister Joana, that John the Baptist was put into prison.

The third of these sisters in grace is a woman named Susanna. Susanna is mentioned nowhere else in the Book of God, and nowhere else in history, so far as I can tell. We know only one thing about this dear lady’s earthly life. — She walked with Christ! What a grand, noble, ennobling biography!

What did these women do? Look at the last line of verse 3. — They “*ministered unto him of their substance.*” How condescending, how gracious, how merciful our Savior is! He who owns the cattle on a thousand hills did not need these women to minister unto him, but he allowed them to! He who multiplied the loaves and fishes did not need to have someone feed him, but he let them! In doing so, our Lord graciously allowed those who loved him to prove the sincerity of their love (2 Corinthians 8:7-9).

These three dear ladies of grace ministered to (served) the Lord Jesus with their substance. They did not ask others for assistance. They took that which was their own, and out of that they ministered to the Savior they loved. The text might be read, “They ministered unto *them* of their substance,” suggesting that they used their means to provide for the company of the disciples. — They counted it a service done to Christ to take of their substance and make provision for his disciples (Romans 16:1-2).

God, grant me the grace to follow my Master’s example of tireless devotion and service to the souls of men and the glory of my God. — May God the Holy Spirit grant that I may, like the Lord’s disciples, ever be found with him. — I pray that God will graciously teach me to honor him with my substance, as these women did, and give me the will to do it for Christ’s sake ([Proverbs 3:5-10).

# Chapter 44

## Take Heed How You Hear

Luke 8:4-18

“And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience. No man, when he hath lighted a

candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth *it* under a bed; but setteth *it* on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither *any thing* hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have” (Luke 8:4-18).

The message of our Lord Jesus in this parable is searching and solemn. — In this parable our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us plainly that the vast majority of those who hear the gospel of the grace of God preached, even the vast majority of those who profess faith in him after hearing the gospel, are unregenerate, lost and perish under the wrath of God. — “*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*” the parable of the sower.

## The Sower

The sower is the man who preaches the gospel of the grace of God. Gospel preachers are like farmers sowing wheat. They broadcast the Word of God upon the ground, upon the hearts of eternity bound men and women. This is not a careless, thoughtless process. The preacher, if he is indeed a faithful, gospel preacher, has his heart in his work. He is not indifferent to those to whom he preaches, or indifferent to their response. Oh, no. God’s servants care deeply for the souls of men. They sow in hope of harvest (Psalm 126:5; Ecclesiastes 11:1; 1 Corinthians 15:58). — The sower is the servant of God, the gospel preacher who faithfully sows the seed of the gospel in hope of a great harvest.

## The Seed

“*Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God*” (v. 11). — The seed sown is the Word of God, the gospel of the grace of God revealed in the Word. We recognize, preach and rejoice in the glorious sovereignty of our God. I take a back seat to no one

in preaching God's absolute sovereignty in all things, especially in the salvation of his elect. Yet, we recognize that God almighty has chosen to use specific means for the accomplishment of his purposes. — *"It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe"* (1 Corinthians 1:21). — *"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"* (Romans 10:17).

That is Bible language. God declares that he saves sinners through the utility of the Word (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23-25). God saves chosen sinners only through, or by means of the faithful exposition of the Scriptures. And the Word of God is faithfully expounded and preached only when the gospel of Christ is faithfully expounded and preached. Rolland Hill was exactly right when he said, "Any sermon that does not contain the 'Three R's' (Ruin by the Fall, Redemption by the Blood, and Regeneration by the Holy Spirit) ought never to have been preached." God's servants are not just preachers. They are gospel preachers. They do not just preach. They preach the gospel.

The sower is the gospel preacher. The seed sown is the Word of God, the gospel of Christ.

## The Results

The results of gospel preaching are always exactly according to the purpose of God. We randomly preach the gospel to all who will hear us; but the results are not random. When God almighty sends forth his Word, his Word always accomplishes his purpose. It either produces life and faith in Christ, or it produces judicial blindness and hardness of heart. Man's unbelief does not in any way, or to even the slightest degree alter the purpose of God. Rather, even the willful unbelief of the reprobate fulfills God's sovereign purpose (Romans 3:3-4; 2 Corinthians 2:14-16).

"And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand" (v. 10). — These words are taken from the Savior's words to Isaiah, when the prophet of God saw the Lord Jesus in his glory, high and lifted up, sitting upon his throne (Isaiah 6:9-10).

Faith in Christ is the gift of God. The seeing eye, the hearing ear, and the believing heart are from the Lord. Faith is not something men muster from within. Faith is the gift and operation of God's free grace in Christ. If you believe, it is because "*unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ to believe on his name*" (Philippians 1:29; Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 2:12).

To those who will not believe, the Word of God is both blinding and binding. None are so blind as those who will not see; and none are so hardened as those who are gospel hardened. When men and women willfully despise the gospel of the grace of God, when they resolutely harden themselves to the Word preached, the very Word which they despise becomes the instrument by which they are bound over to everlasting judgment, to eat the fruit of their own way (Proverbs 1:23-33)..

### Wayside Hearers

Some who hear the gospel receive it as seed sown by the wayside. — "Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (v. 12). Some hear with no concern for their souls, the glory of God, or eternity. They attend church because they have to, or because it is the respectable thing to do, or because they think it is their duty to do so. But they really have no interest in the things of God. They try their best not to hear a word the preacher speaks, or at least not to be bothered by what he says. They try to think about other things. And, unless God intervenes and does something for them, the gospel they hear will profit them nothing. Before they get out the door the old black crow of hell snatches away the seed from their hard hearts.

### Stony Ground Hearers.

Others are described as stony ground hearers. — "*They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy;*

*and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away”* (v. 13). There are many stony ground hearers. The preaching of the gospel makes very quick, but only temporary impressions upon them. Their religion is all superficial, just a flash in the pan, nothing else. Like burning briars in a fire, they may crackle and pop, and make a lot of noise, but they produce nothing. They appear enthusiastic. They talk a good game. They are sometimes moved to tears. They may even speak about inward conflicts, hopes, desires, struggles and fears. But they lack one thing. They have no root. The root of the matter is not in them. Like seed sown in unprepared soil, the Word of God takes no root in them, because there is no work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Unconvinced, they have no Holy Spirit conviction. Unturned, they cannot and will not repent. Unbelieving, they have no faith!

These stony ground hearers endure for a while; but they will not last. Their religion is like Jonah’s gourd. It springs up in a night and is gone in a night. They are like cut flowers. They look pretty and smell nice for a while, but soon wither and die. They have no root. Christ is not in them and they are not in Christ. A little trial, affliction, or temptation will be too great for the stony ground hearer to endure. Any persecution or opposition, because of the offense of the gospel, will destroy them.

## Thorny Ground Hearers

Others are set before us in this parable as thorny ground hearers. — “And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (v. 14). The wayside hearer has no interest at all in the things of God. He could care less who Christ is and what he did. The stony ground hearer is somewhat impressive. He makes a big splash, but does not last very long. The thorny ground hearer is something else.

The thorny ground hearer assents to the gospel, approves of it, and is moved by it. He appears to make a good start, and seems to go a long way in religion. He feels much, experiences

much, and may even do much that appears to be truly spiritual; but he has a basic, fundamental, underlying problem. It is a problem that may lie under the surface, hidden from every eye but God's. It may even be hidden from his own eyes. But it will eventually destroy him. The problem is worldliness. The world still holds his heart. He loves the world.

Oh, beware of religion without Christ! You may think, "All is well with my soul. No one could ever feel what I feel and experience what I have experienced and yet be lost." You ought to think again! False faith is a strong delusion, a delusion by which, in this parable, one in four who profess faith in Christ are dragged down to hell! — False faith may be greatly enlightened and knowledgeable of the gospel (Hebrews 6:4). — False faith may greatly reform the outward life, like the Pharisees. — False faith may speak very well of Christ, as the Jews did. — False faith may confess personal sins, like Saul. — False faith may humble itself in sackcloth and ashes with Ahab. — False faith may repent in tears with Esau and Judas. — False faith may diligently perform religious works with the Jews. — False faith may be very generous and charitable, like Ananias and Sapphira. — False faith may tremble under the Word with Felix. — False faith may experience great things in religion (Hebrews 6:1-4). — False faith may enjoy great religious privileges with Lot's wife. — False faith may preach, perform miracles and cast out devils, like those mentioned by our Lord. — False faith may attain high office in the church, like Diotrephes. — False faith may walk with great preachers, like Demas. — False faith may even be peaceful and carnally secure, like the five foolish virgins.

It is written, "*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*" (1 John 2:15). Sooner or later those who love the world will choose the world. The sad fact is that though they willfully choose the world and turn from Christ, they are so thoroughly justified in their own minds that what they are doing is right that they never even realize they have done it, until they wake up in hell.

If you are one of these thorny ground hearers, the Lord Jesus plainly warns you that one of these three things will eventually

destroy your soul: — “The Care of this World” — “The Deceitfulness of Riches” — “The Pleasures of This Life.”

## Good Ground Hearers

True Believers are those who receive the gospel as seed sown in good ground. — “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (v. 15). The good ground is a regenerate heart, a heart prepared by God the Holy Spirit to receive the Word of grace. The fallow ground of the heart has been broken up by the deep cutting, sharp plow of the law. The hard clods have been broken by the heavy harrow of conviction, beaten to pieces by the thunderous rain of God’s wrath, and at last softened by the sweet dew of heaven.

The Word of God sown in the regenerate heart, the heart prepared by the grace and power of God to receive it, brings forth fruit unto God. Some bear fruit more rapidly and more plentifully than others; but all bear fruit from God. The fruit they bear is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Now, read these next three verses as they are given in this context, and hear the Master’s warning.

“No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth *it* under a bed; but setteth *it* on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither *any thing* hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.” (Luke 8:16-18)

Take heed what you hear. Make certain that the message you hear is the gospel of God, not some false gospel of free will, works religion. Take heed that you hear. Make it your business to hear the gospel regularly. And take heed how you hear. Ask God the Holy Spirit to enable you to hear the gospel with a

submissive, believing heart.

# Chapter 45

## Everybody Ought to Know

### Luke 8:16-21

“No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth *it* under a bed; but setteth *it* on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither *any thing* hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have. Then came to him *his* mother and his brethren, and could not come at him for the press. And it was told him *by certain* which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee. And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it” (Luke 8:16-21).

When I attended Sunday School as a boy, the children often sang...

“Everybody ought to know,  
Everybody ought to know,  
Every body ought to know  
Who Jesus is!  
He’s the Lily of the Valley!  
He’s the Bright and Morning Star!  
He’s the Fairest of ten thousand!  
Everybody ought to know!”

That is exactly what our Savior tells us in Luke 8:16-21. If we would interpret these verses properly we must keep them in their

context. Our Lord has just given and explained the parable of the sower. Here he is making a very practical application of that parable to us. The things here written for our learning and admonition are intended to nail down and fix in our minds this mighty lesson. — That which God teaches us by his grace we are to proclaim to others.

There are three great, weighty, important things taught in these short, simple verses of Holy Scripture. May God the Holy Spirit, whose Word we have before us, write these things upon our hearts by his grace.

## Our Responsibility

*First*, our Master here teaches us that it is our responsibility to proclaim abroad the gospel we have learned by divine revelation.

“No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth *it* under a bed; but setteth *it* on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither *any thing* hid, that shall not be known and come abroad” (vv. 16-17).

No one lights a candle to hide it. The reason for lighting the candle is that it may be held forth to diffuse its light. Whenever we read or hear these words from the lips of our Savior, we ought first to think of ourselves. God has revealed the gospel to us for the saving of our souls. How we ought to rejoice in that and thank him for it! But he has also given us the gospel as a trust. He has put the light of divine truth into our hands so that we might carry it forth into this world of darkness for the salvation of other chosen, redeemed sinners. God did not give us the knowledge of his Son, his grace and his salvation, so that we might simply profess it, admire it and discuss it, but that we might proclaim it.

The gospel is a talent, a treasure, committed to our hands, with which we have been entrusted. That trust brings with it a great weight of responsibility. It is the responsibility of every believer, every local church and every gospel preacher to

proclaim the gospel of Christ, to make Christ known in the generation in which they live (Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 9:16; Ephesians 3:8).

When we hear or read these words (vv. 16-17) falling from the lips of our dear Savior, we ought to also think of others. We live in a world of darkness. The multitudes around us, in our homes, in our communities, around the nation and around the world, are perishing for want of knowledge. Behold the peoples of the world. Get them fixed in your heart. They are without God, without Christ, without hope!

Is there nothing we can do for them? Indeed there is something we can and must do for them. We must hold forth in this dark world the light of the gospel, with fervency, earnestness, and zeal (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1; 2 Corinthians 5:10-14). I fully agree with J. C. Ryle, who wrote, “The highest form of selfishness is that of a man who is content to go to heaven alone. The truest charity is to endeavor to share with others every spark of religious (gospel) light we possess ourselves, and so hold forth our own candle that it may give light to everyone around us.” God never lights a candle that it may burn alone!

In verse 17 our Lord is declaring that the gospel must and shall be preached in all the world. Remember the context. Though in the Day of Judgment all things shall be brought to light, in the sense that God will cause all men to see clearly what he has done, this is not a declaration that God is going to show the world all our inmost secret thoughts. Our Lord is here telling his disciples that the things then hidden and spoken in parables would be openly proclaimed in this gospel day by them, by his church and by faithful gospel preachers in all succeeding ages (Matthew 24:14).

## Hearing the Word

Second, our Lord teaches us in verse 18 that we must take heed how we hear the gospel. — “Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to

have.” I dealt with this admonition extensively in the previous chapter. So I will say much here. But we must not fail to heed this word of instruction. The degree to which we will benefit from the ministry of the Word depends greatly upon the way we hear it. Going to church and hearing sermons will do us no good, unless we hear right. If we would hear the Word of God right, we must lay to heart these four simple rules for hearing it.

1. Be sure that what you hear is the Gospel. – Like the noble Bereans, search the Scriptures and see for yourself that the things you hear from the pulpit and the things written in the Book of God are the same.
2. Hear the Word of God as the Word of God, with reverence.
3. Be sure you hear the gospel with implicit faith, not as the word of man, but as the Word of God (Hebrews 4:1-2).
4. Hear the Word with prayer, praying for God to bless it to your own soul, making personal application of it to yourself.

## God's Family

*Third*, in verses 19-21, we are taught that those, and those only, who hear and obey the gospel are the family of God.

“Then came to him *his* mother and his brethren, and could not come at him for the press. And it was told him *by certain* which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee. And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.”

What blessed privileges are ours in Christ! The person who hears the Word of God and does it is the sinner who hearing the gospel call comes to Christ. The Master says, “*believe on me,*” and we believe. He says, “*repent,*” and we repent. He says, “*follow me,*” and we follow. Without question, to obey the gospel will bring a man or woman great trouble. To believe on the Lord

Jesus Christ is to take up your cross and follow him. It is to enlist in an army, to engage in combat with the world, the flesh and the devil. But the privileges far outweigh, infinitely outweigh, the costs (Romans 8:17-18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; 1 Peter 1:3-9).

Let us make it our business to do what we can in this our day for the furtherance of the gospel and the salvation of God's elect. Let us ever take heed how we hear the Word of God. And let us ever hold before our hearts and minds the great privileges that are ours in Christ Jesus our Lord.

# Chapter 46

## Hearing the Word of God

### Luke 8:16-18

“No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth *it* under a bed; but setteth *it* on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither *any thing* hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have” (Luke 8:16-18).

There is much need for some plain, simple, biblical instruction about hearing the Word of God, about how we ought to hear the preaching of the gospel.

“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter *any* thing before God: for God *is* in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.” (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2)

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness

and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” (James 1:17-22)

In Luke 8:18 the Lord Jesus Christ is addressing his own disciples, both those who truly were his disciples and those who merely professed to be. Knowing that a great multitude of people were gathered together to hear him out of every city, and knowing (He is God, and knows all things.) that most of them would be hearers only, and not doers of the Word, our Lord spoke to them by a parable. He used the similitude of a farmer who went out to sow his seed (vv. 4-16). In that parable the Savior plainly tells us that few there are, in any group of hearers, who receive any saving benefit from the preaching of the gospel. Three things are evident in the parable of the sower...

1. The preaching of the gospel is the sowing of the seed of life.
2. Only those whose hearts are made good by the regenerating power and grace of God the Holy Spirit receive the Word to the saving of their souls. And...
3. Once we have received the good seed of the gospel into our hearts, we must take care that nothing chokes it out and destroys its influence.

Then, in verse 18 the Lord Jesus says to all who hear the gospel preached, “*Take heed, therefore, how ye hear.*” If we would profit from the ordinance of God, if we would profit spiritually and eternally from the preaching of the gospel, we must take heed how we hear it. Let us take heed what we hear, making certain that we hear no preaching, but the preaching of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ. And let us take heed how we hear the gospel preached.

## Seize Every Opportunity

Let it be clearly understood that we ought to seize every opportunity God gives us to hear the gospel. If you are wise, you

will avail yourself of every opportunity God gives you to gather with his saints in public worship, to give him praise and hear his Word. I am not talking about just going to church. I urge all under my influence never to attend those religious circuses called churches. In those places, they hardly let people breathe, for fear of losing them. They keep people busy doing something every night of the week and most days. I do not suggest that we should simply go to church and entertain ourselves in the hearing of sermons and in the pursuit of religious activities. That will profit your soul nothing.

However, there is a trend today in many places that concerns me. The trend in many places, places where the gospel is preached, is to have less and less preaching, less and less public worship. I know of many places where the assembly meets only twice a week, others where they only have one service a week and others where they have even less. Many reasons are given for this. Perhaps there are situations in which it is justified. But I get hungry more often than that. Don't you? I need to be with my family more than that. I need to hear from God more often than that. — Don't you? The Word of God does not tell us how often we should meet together. So we must set no rules in this regard; and we must never attempt to impose our practices upon others in areas where the Scriptures are silent.

Still, I think there is something terribly dangerous and unhealthy about squeezing our time in the house of God down to as little as we can comfortably fit into our lives. Let us take care that nothing chokes out the influence of the gospel in our lives. Like Simeon and Anna, I want to be found in the house of God, beholding God's Salvation, speaking the praise of Christ and learning of him. Like Mephibosheth, I want to be found sitting at the King's table. Like Mary, I want to be found sitting at his feet.

### *The Gospel and Gospel Preaching*

Make certain that in hearing, you hear the gospel. Do not ever delude yourself into thinking that religion is good. Only gospel religion is good. All other religion is deadly and damning. It is

not going to church that profits our souls. It is not the hearing of sermons that profits us. It is not religious chatter that benefits us. It is the preaching of the gospel, the declaration of our great God, his greatness, his goodness, his glory and his wondrous works in the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14).

It is from the house of God, the assembled body of Christ, that God commands the blessing upon his people (Psalm. 133:3). No wonder David sang as he did about the blessedness of public worship (Psalms 122:1-9; 84:10). This matter of hearing the gospel is so important that our risen Savior has specifically given the ministry of the gospel to his church as one of his chief ascension gifts (Psalm 68:18-19; Ephesians 4:11-12).

God has always gifted specific, chosen men for the work of the ministry, to serve the souls of men, men whom he has specifically called to that great work. Jude tells us, that “*Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied (or preached) concerning the Lord’s coming with ten thousand of his saints to judgment.*” Peter tells us that Noah was “*a preacher of righteousness,*” the righteousness of God in Christ. God never left himself without a witness, even in those earliest times, but at sundry times, and after diverse manners, spoke to our fathers by the patriarchs and prophets.

After the giving of the law, the Lord God constantly separated to himself a certain order of men to preach to, as well as pray for his people. Israel always had her prophets and her priests. Though the Jews were often carried away into captivity, and, because of their sins, scattered abroad among the nations, yet God faithfully and graciously kept up a remnant of prophets and preachers, like Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel and others, to reprove, instruct and call men to repentance.

Great as those days were, we live in a better day, with better provisions. When our Lord Jesus Christ, our great High-priest, had through the eternal Spirit offered himself as a full, perfect, sufficient, effectual sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of his people, and after his resurrection had all power committed to him, both in heaven and on earth, he gave commission to his Apostles, and in them to all succeeding gospel preachers, to “go

*into all the world and preach his gospel to every creature,”* promising “*to be with us, (to guide, assist, strengthen, and comfort us always,) even unto the end of the world.”*

It is my responsibility, and the responsibility of God’s servants everywhere to preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16), it is your responsibility to hear the message God sends his servant to deliver. God does not send a man to beat the air.

How insensible most people are of this unspeakable gift! They do despite to the Spirit of grace, crucify the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame, by willfully refusing to attend God’s ordained means of grace! How terrible will the end of such men be? How tormenting it will be that light should come into the world, that the glad tidings of salvation should be so very frequently proclaimed in a place, only to be despised by many! The spiritual manna of the gospel, this angel’s food is despised as a worthless thing. Our Lord declares that it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those who despise the gospel (Matthew 11:20-24). Better that men had never heard of a Savior being born, than after they have heard (or despised the opportunity to hear), not to give heed to the ministry of those who are employed as God’s ambassadors to declare the good news of free, saving grace in Christ! George Whitefield accurately interpreted our Savior’s doctrine when he said...

“We may, though at a distance, without a spirit of prophesy, foretell the deplorable condition of such men; behold them cast into hell, lifting up their eyes, being in torment, and crying out, How often would our ministers have gathered us, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings? But we would not. O that we had known in that our day, the things that belonged to our everlasting peace! But now they are forever hid from our eyes. Thus wretched, thus inconceivably miserable, will such be as slight and make a mock at the public preaching of the gospel.”

## Suggestions for Hearing

Here are some suggestions that may, with the blessing Of God the Holy Spirit, help you to hear the gospel with spiritual profit. Gospel preaching is the ordinance of God, the means appointed by Christ himself for the saving of his people and the building of his kingdom among men. This is the method by which God the Holy Spirit does his work in the souls of men. Consider these facts, and you will gladly heed these four admonitions, though they may reprove you and though the reproof may be painful.

1. Never come to the house of God to gratify your religious curiosity.

When we come to the house of God, let us come seeking to know Christ, to hear of Christ, to learn of Christ and to worship Christ. It is not an honorable thing, but a contemptible thing to sit around and discuss endless questions about nothing, ever learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:5-7). Flee, flee religious curiosity, as you would flee the plague! Come to the house of God with humility, ready to receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your soul.

2. Listen carefully, attentively, to the message God sends his servant to deliver to your soul.

Give earnest heed to the things that are spoken from the Word of God. Take great care to hear what God has to say to you. When the Lord God descended on Mt. Sinai in terrible majesty to give his law, the children of Israel sat up and paid attention to his servant Moses. If they were earnest to hear the thunderings, threatenings and terrors of the law, how gladly sinners ought to sit up and anxiously hear the preacher of the gospel, as he proclaims the glad tidings of free grace in Christ!

No gospel preacher is sent to deliver a dry, insipid lecture on

moral philosophy, legal duty, religious history, or creedal accuracy. God Almighty sends his messengers to unfold before eternity bound sinners the great mystery of godliness and the mysteries of the kingdom of his grace: redemption, forgiveness, salvation, peace, pardon, free justification and eternal life in, by and with the Lord Jesus Christ! When a man opens the Word of God before men, he is not reading a dime store novel to you. He is proclaiming the Word of the eternal God.

Here is a third word of counsel we will all be wise to heed.

3. Do not allow Satan, or any by whom he is served, to prejudice your mind against faithful men sent of God to preach the gospel to you.

Take heed and beware of entertaining any dislike of those the Holy Ghost has made overseers over you. If a man faithfully preaches the gospel, receive him like the Galatians received Paul, before the Judaizers corrupted them, as an angel of God.

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” (1 Corinthians 4:1)

“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 2:17)

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” (Isaiah 52:7)

4. As you ought not to be prejudiced against God's servant, so you must be careful not to depend too much on a preacher, or think more highly of him than you ought to think.

God's servants are instruments in his hands, no more and no less, just instruments by which God works in his vineyard (1 Corinthians 3:5-9, 21-23). Their labors are made profitable to your soul only by the blessing of God. So pray for that man who is God's messenger to your soul. Pray that God will preserve him, give him a message for your soul and grace to deliver it; and pray that the Lord will graciously enable you to hear the message.

5. Always seek grace from God to personally apply the message to your own heart and life.

Always presume that the message was prepared with you in mind, and spoken to you alone. We are all terribly inclined to look across the room and behold a little splinter in our brother's eye, rather than deal with the two by four in our own. Seek grace from God always to personally appropriate his message.

6. If you would receive a blessing from the Lord, when you hear his gospel preached, you should do something before the sermon, during the sermon and after the sermon.

Before the sermon, set things in order in you life so that you come to the house of God awake and alert. Pray for the preacher and for yourself; but do not neglect to pray for your brothers and sisters and for lost sinners who hear the gospel with you.

During the sermon, listen attentively, constantly praying for God to speak to your heart, for Christ's sake, exposing and convincing you of your sin, correcting you, comforting your soul, reviving your heart, giving you a fresh view of the Lord Jesus. Again, seek the same for your brothers and sisters.

After the sermon, discuss the message with one another and with you family; and ask God to plant the seed sown in your own heart and in the hearts of others, for Christ's sake.

“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have *free* course, and be glorified, even as *it is* with you.” (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.” (Ephesians 6:18-19)

If we would but take heed how we hear, we might yet, again, see Satan cast out like lightning. We might yet see sinners converted. We might yet see God work in us, with us and in our midst! We might yet find the Word preached sharper than any two-edged sword and mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the devil's strong holds!

The Holy Spirit might yet fall upon our assemblies, as he did when Peter preached the gospel of Christ! The gospel of God might again run swiftly and run well, having free course in the hearts of men. God Almighty, our great God and Savior, is he with whom nothing is impossible. He who added three thousand to the church on one day in one place is perfectly capable of doing the same again today!

“*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.*” — He has promised to be with us always, even unto the end of the world. I am convinced that the reason we do not receive larger blessings from the presence of the Lord is not because our all-powerful Redeemer's hand is shortened, but because we do not expect them (Psalms 81:13-14; Isaiah 48:17-19).

Yes, sometimes, our God, to magnify his free grace in Christ Jesus, is found of them that sought him not. Notorious sinners are, sometimes, forcibly plucked as a firebrand out of the fire; but that is not God's ordinary way of acting. Normally, he visits

those with the power of his Spirit who humbly take heed how they hear, seeking to know him, his will and his way, and sends the careless away not only empty, but hardened!

Take heed, therefore, how you hear. Remember, "*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.*" How will they stand at the bar of an angry, sin-avenging Judge, and see so many messages they have despised, so many preachers, who once longed and labored for the salvation of their immortal souls, brought out as swift witnesses against them! But it shall not be so with you, who with meekness receive the engrafted Word. You will be your pastor's joy, and crown of rejoicing in the day of our Lord Jesus: In that day he will present you in a holy triumph, faultless, and unblameable, as a chaste virgin to Christ your common Redeemer, saying, "*Behold I, O Lord, and the children which thou hast given me!*"

# Chapter 47

## “There came down a storm.”

Luke 8:22-25

“Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth. But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled *with water*, and were in jeopardy. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm. And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him” (Luke 8:22-25).

I encourage you to read the accounts of this event in the lives of our Lord’s disciples as they are recorded by Matthew and Mark (Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41). This is an event of great importance. Both the story itself and the variations in each of these Gospel narratives are preserved upon the pages of Holy Scripture by divine purpose and infallible inspiration. They are written and written as they are for our learning and instruction. May God the Holy Spirit now teach us what he would have us learn from this event.

As our Lord Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee, “*there came down a storm.*” The disciples, in the panic of their terror, were filled with unbelief. When they cried out, as Matthew records it, “*Lord, Save us! We perish!*” Mark reports

their cry, “*Master, carest thou not that we perish!*” And Luke tells us that they cried, “*Master, Master, We perish!*” I suspect that with twelve terrified men in one small, storm tossed, little boat there were more cries than these three. But these three are recorded to show us the terror that filled the hearts of these poor men.

The Lord Jesus arose, calmly rebuked their unbelief, and, by the mere power of his word, calmed the sea and the storm.

Few, if any, of our Lord’s miracles were so likely to leave his disciples with such an unforgettable, convincing demonstration of his divine omnipotence. At least four of these men were professional fishermen and skilled seamen. In all likelihood Peter, Andrew, James and John were very familiar with the Sea of Galilee. They had probably been exposed to its devastating and often fatal storms from their youth. Never, not even in the greatest of our Lord’s other miracles, had they seen such power as he demonstrated here. By the mere word of his mouth, our Savior stopped the storm!

## Lessons

There are many important lessons taught in these verses. We would be wise to ask the Spirit of God to remind us of them frequently.

1. Faith in and obedience to Christ do not exempt God’s saints from the storms that other people face.
2. The fact that our Lord was weary and required sleep demonstrates clearly that he was a real man.
3. The fact that the wind and sea obeyed his word demonstrated our Redeemer’s complete deity. This Man is the omnipotent God! The wind and the sea knew the voice of their Creator! — Only One who is both God and man could redeem us and save us from our sins.
4. The greatest saints in this world are still sinners; and the strongest believers are sometimes filled

with unbelief.

5. Our Lord Jesus Christ is a tender, compassionate, forgiving Savior. He is kind, gentle, and gracious, even in the rebuke of his disciples. — *“Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?”*
6. Our Savior’s reason for everything he does is the salvation of his elect. He went to the other side of the sea because there was a wild, lost Gadarene on the other side, for whom the fulness of time had come.
7. All who are in the good ship Grace with Christ are perfectly safe as they pass through the stormy seas of this world.

## Parable of Life

Those seven lessons are lessons frequently taught in Holy Scripture. They should be frequently taught to God’s people. They are lessons we all need to be reminded of frequently. Yet, as I read these verses, I see a parable that portrays every believer’s life as he makes his pilgrimage through this world.

When the Son of God enters the hearts of chosen sinners in his sovereign, saving power and grace, he brings us with himself into the church and kingdom of God; he brings us with himself into the ship of grace and salvation. As he does, he casts his eyes and ours across the waters of time to the other side of the sea of life, and says, as, he did to his disciples in our text, *“Let us go over unto the other side.”* Read Psalm 107:23-31 and you will see that I have a good, biblical basis for using this parable as a parable of our lives in this world.

“They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s

end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men!”

## A Voyage

Every believer’s life is a voyage. It is a voyage across a troubled sea to our “*desired haven*” on the other side. As we embark on this voyage, the Son of God takes us into the good ship Grace and says, “*Let us go over unto the other side.*” Death is often spoken of poetically as a passing over, the crossing of a sea or a river. We sing,

He will keep me `til the river  
Rolls its waters at my feet,  
Then He’ll bear me safely over,  
Where my Savior I shall meet.

However, this passing over the sea is not something we shall do someday. It is something we do every day. Living in this world, we are passing over the sea of time unto the other side. We are walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

The sea is a fit emblem for our lives and all the varied circumstances of our lives in this world. How quickly we pass across the sea. — “*What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*” (James 4:14). — “*My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and are spent without hope*” (Job 7:6). — “*Now my days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good. They are passed away as the swift ships: as the eagle that hasteth to the prey*” (Job 9:25-26).

I have watched a lot of people die. As I look into the faces of eternity bound sinners day after day, as I am about to preach the gospel to them, I think to myself, “There go the ships, not painted

ships upon a painted sea, but immortal souls, rising and falling upon the billows of time, disappearing one by one over the horizon of time into eternity.” Soon, we must all pass over that horizon.

Perhaps, the horizon seems very far away to you. Do not be so foolish. Soon, you will pass from this changing world of time into the unchanging world of eternity. Here all things are temporal and changing. There all things are eternal and unchanging. How will it be for you in that day? How will it be for you in the swelling of the Jordan?

### **A Voyage Across a Stormy Sea**

*Second*, life in this world is not only comparable to a voyage, but it is a voyage across a stormy sea. — “*But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy*” (v. 23). We must often sail into the tempests of sorrow, affliction, adversity, and grief; but Christ’s presence assures us of safety no matter what the storm may be.

These disciples followed the Master into the ship at his command. It is important to note that fact, because we need to recognize that loyalty and obedience to Christ is often the surest course to trouble. The path of faithfulness is always right through the eye of the storm.

Though our storms are many and varied, basically, all our trials and troubles in this world arise from two sources: (1.) The contrary winds of our circumstances without, and (2.) the waves of sin and unbelief within (Romans 7:14-24; Psalm 73:1-3, 21-28).

### **A Voyage with Christ**

*Third*, our life in this world is a voyage with Christ. A voyage, yes. A voyage through stormy seas, yes. But, blessed be God, it is a voyage in the company and constant presence, protection, and

care of the Son of God, our Savior.

The Lord Jesus does not say, “Go over to the other side and I will meet you there.” He said, “*Let us pass over unto the other side.*” And, though “*there arose a great storm, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was full,*” we read that the Lord Jesus “*was in the hinder part of the ship.*” He was silent; but he was there. So it is with us. Our Lord may appear to be asleep. He may be silent. It may even appear at times to our feeble, sinful hearts that He does not care if we perish; but He is always with us!

How I pray that God will teach me and teach you to believe him. Did not our Savior say, “*Lo, I am with you alway*”? Did He not promise, “*I will never leave thee*” (Hebrews 13:5)?

“Fear thou not; for I *am* with thee: be not dismayed; for I *am* thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10).

“When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isaiah 43:2).

“Rejoice in the Lord alway: *and* again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7)

## A Voyage Marked by Miracles

*Fourth*, ours is a voyage marked by miracles. — “*And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm*” (v. 39). The charismatics talk about miracles. We experience them. They put

on a show of sham tomfoolery; but God's saints are men and women whose biographies are histories of God's miraculous works. The redemption of our souls was accomplished by the miracle of God the Son assuming our nature, being made sin for us, dying in our place, and rising from the dead as our Surety. The new birth is a wonder of miraculous grace, accomplished by Christ himself invading our spiritually dead souls by his Spirit and taking up permanent residence in our hearts.

“It took a miracle to put the world in place.  
It took a miracle to hang the stars in space.  
But when God saved my soul,  
Cleansed and made me whole,  
It took a miracle of love and grace!”

And, soon, our blessed Savior will perform another miracle, called the resurrection.

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-58)

Still, there is more, much more to consider. It is upon the dark background of our great troubles that our Lord most clearly displays his wondrous power and grace. It is in the fiery furnace of adversity that we know the preserving power of His presence. It is only in the lions' den that we see the Lord's dominion over

the lions. The Lord God who is with us and for us is the God who is able to deliver us. He is God alone. He is God indeed!

## A Voyage Free of Fear

*Fifth*, our voyage with Christ across the stormy sea of life is a voyage that ought to be free of fear. The voyage we are on is a perfectly safe voyage. — “*And he said unto them, Where is your faith?*” (v. 25) — “*Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?*” (Mark 4:40)

The disciples’ fear arose from their unbelief. Fear is the rank weed of nature that grows wild in the soil of unbelief. These poor disciples were so much like us. They should have been perfectly calm. They were on the Master’s business. They were in the Master’s presence. They had repeatedly seen and experienced the Master’s power. They should have most reasonably looked to Christ; but they didn’t. Instead of looking to the Lord God omnipotent, they looked at the terrible storm, their own weakness, and the apparent frailty of their ship.

Let us take the Lord’s gentle rebuke personally. I try to apply it to myself. I hope God will enable you to do the same. Our greatest difficulties, our greatest temptations, our greatest falls are always the result of unbelief. Yet, unbelief on the part of one who has experienced the saving power and grace of God in Christ is the most absurd and unreasonable thing in the world.

“*Where is your faith?*” — “*Why are we so fearful? How is it that we have no faith?*” Our Savior is the sovereign God of providence, wise, good, and omnipotent. He is too wise to err, too good to do wrong, and too strong to fail.

And He is in the boat with us. Yes, the Son of God is in the little boat of your heart and mine (Colossians 1:27; 1 John 4:4). The Lord Jesus Christ is in the boat of his Church (Deuteronomy 23:14; Psalms 46:5; Revelation 2:1). The Church of God, the true Church, is safe. She will pass over this sea. She will be brought to her desired haven. She will reach the other side. Not one passenger aboard the good ship Grace will be lost at sea.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is in the boat of Holy Scripture. His Word is forever settled in heaven. It cannot be broken. All the shifting winds of pseudo-science and waves of unscholarly criticism will not sink the Vessel. We have no reason to fear the carpings of reprobate men. The Word of God abides forever. When their laughter is turned to weeping and their criticisms burn as fire in their souls, the Word of God will still be forever settled in heaven!

Our Lord Jesus Christ is in the boat of Providence. Not only is He in the boat, He is at the helm. We do not trust providence, or worship providence (We are not Deists.); but the Lord God almighty, whom we do trust and worship, is the God of providence; and we rejoice to know it.

The Lord Jesus Christ, who is with us, has the whole world in His hands. All power in heaven and earth is given unto him. He holds the reins of universal dominion. This omnipotent God bids us cast our care upon him with these assuring words, "*For he careth for you!*" He says to us, "*Be not afraid, only believe.*"

## A Call to Faith

Are you yet without Christ? Has God brought you into deep waters and begun to cause you to reel to and fro like a drunken man by reason of your soul's trouble? Is the storm of God's wrath beating your little boat? May the Spirit of God make this parable a call to faith in your soul. Cry out from your soul to Christ, the Master. Appeal to His great compassion, — "*Carest thou not that I perish?*" May the Son of God arise and speak peace to your troubled heart. If He will speak by His Spirit, His word of grace will bring great calm; and He will bring you to your desired haven.

"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and

fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men!...The righteous shall see *it*, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth. Whoso *is* wise, and will observe these *things*, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD" (Psalm 107:23-31, 42-43).

Believe him, only believe him, and you will see the glory of God (John 11:40).

# Chapter 48

## Grace for the Gadarene

Luke 8:26-39

“And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in *any* house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not. (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.) And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed *them* saw what was done, they fled, and went and told *it* in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also which saw *it* told them by what means

he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him” (Luke 8:26-39).

For every chosen, redeemed sinner there is an appointed time when he shall be called by God’s almighty grace. That time is called “*The Time of Life*” and “*The Time of Love.*” Though born children of wrath, even as others, God’s elect were from eternity the objects of immutable mercy, love and grace. Though we ran hell-bent to destruction, the Lord God, from old eternity said, “*Hitherto shalt thou go and no further.*” Though Satan roared against us, though the legions of hell sought to destroy us, though our hearts were in league with hell itself, at God’s appointed time of love, the Lord Jesus Christ came to us, and, by the power of his omnipotent grace, saved us. For the poor maniac of Gadara, when the time of love came, the Lord Jesus came to him with the mighty operations of his saving grace.

It is a story that is told by Matthew, Mark and Luke. All three of these Gospel writers were inspired of God the Holy Spirit to record this event in considerable detail. Mark gives us the most detailed account of what transpired that day in the land of the Gadarenes; but all three hold this story before us as a remarkable display both of our Lord’s great grace to needy sinners and of his sovereign dominion even over the demons of hell. — As the Lord Jesus Christ vanquished hell in the heart and life of this poor demoniac in Gadara two thousand years ago, so he vanquishes hell itself in the hearts of chosen redeemed sinners by the saving operations of his grace.

## The Savior of Sinners

*“And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee”* (v. 26). The Lord Jesus had just come from the other side of the Sea of Galilee to the shores of Gadara. When he set sail for Gadara, he knew that he was sailing directly into a storm. Yet, he set sail willingly. He was on an errand of mercy. He was going to Gadara to save one chosen sinner, for whom the time of love had come. The Lord Jesus came through the storm, across the sea, with willing heart to save the chosen sinner, when the fulness of time had come. When he had delivered the object of his grace, he returned to the other side of the sea, from whence he came.

This is exactly what our Redeemer did for all his people. He left his lofty throne in heaven, came across the sea of time and mortality, suffered the horrible storm of God’s wrath as our Substitute to save us, and, when he had done that mighty work by which his chosen must be saved (when he had satisfied the law and justice of God and put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself), he went back to the other side again (Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10; 1 Timothy 1:15; Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:5; Hebrews 10:10-14).

He came to save the least likely of the Gadarenes, a wild man, a maniac, one who was entirely possessed of the devil. In fact, a legion of demons resided in his poor soul. However, as we shall see, this man would be the instrument of mercy by whom God would bring his grace and salvation to many others in days to come (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

The Son of God came to Gadara to dispossess Satan of one of his captives, to bind the strong man, take his house, and spoil him of his goods; and he did not leave until he had done what he came to do. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Savior of sinners.

## A Miserable Wretch

“And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in *any* house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not. (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.) And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him.” (vv. 27-30)

Matthew in his account tells us that there were two mad, demon possessed Gadarenes who met the Master on the shores of Gadara. Some point to that fact and say, “There, you see, the Bible is full of contradictions.” I fail to see their brilliance. If there were two, there had to be one; and Luke was inspired of God to write about one, giving far more detail than Matthew did in his description of the two. Apparently, the man described by Luke was the more notoriously wicked of the two. Look at what the Holy Spirit tells us about this sinner. What a sad, sad picture it is.

This poor Gadarene was a miserable wretch. Though the picture falls far short of the thing portrayed by it, the distressing circumstances of the poor demoniac vividly portray the terrible consequences of the fall of our father Adam, and the utter ruin of our race in the fall. Every descendent of Adam is by nature under the full sway and influence of an unclean spirit. We are all by nature ruled by our own depraved, corrupt hearts and wills, and are taken captive by Satan at his will (Romans 3:10-19; 1 John 3:8; 2 Timothy 2:26). Robert Hawker rightly observed, “Were it not for restraining grace, of which the sinner is wholly unconscious, what tremendous evils, in ten thousand times ten thousand instances, would take place!” We are, because of the fall and Satan’s conquest of our nature, in bondage to sin with all

its dreadful consequences. The flesh with its lusts, the world with its deceits, and Satan with his devices rule the fallen sons of Adam with absolute sway.

In addition to all this, we are justly condemned by the law and justice of God threatening us with everlasting torment, and by the accusations of our own consciences. This is the state and condition of every fallen son and daughter of Adam, which causes all to live all their life time in the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15).

### An Unclean Spirit

Like this poor Gadarene, we all have an unclean spirit by nature. Yes, this man was possessed of the devil; but the devil could never have possessed him had he not been unclean by nature. Even so, the wicked, who opposing God oppose themselves, are this day “*taken captive by Satan at his will*” (2 Timothy 2:26). Isaiah declares that we are all as an unclean thing. Our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Out of our hearts come forth every abominable evil that exists in this world. Oh, if only we knew the evil of our hearts, the shocking horror of that wickedness that resides in us would prevent us from ever again saying, with regard of any vile act of a man, “How could a man do such a thing?”

### Living Among the Dead

This poor, mad, depraved soul lived among the dead. Mark tells us that he was “*dwelling among the tombs.*” Dead sinners, dead in trespasses and sins, live among dead sinners, like themselves. Is that the case with you? You who live without Christ live among the dead, for you are dead. This man was not dead physically, but he was dead spiritually. Therefore, he was most comfortable among the dead. That is where I was when the Lord found me; and that is where you are by nature (Ephesians 2:1-4).

## Could not be Bound

This poor, wild man could not be bound with the fetters and chains that bind other men. The fetters of society, social acceptance, peer approval, social advantage, family pressure, reputation, and concern for the opinions of others, those things that bind most men and make them behave with an outward form of decency, simply have no effect on some. The law of God has no influence upon most. They refuse to acknowledge its power, and cannot be bound by it. Night and day they run to destruction in a life of mad behavior that will inevitably bring them to hell, except the grace of God intervene.

I say it to my shame, but that was my condition. Like the maniac of Gadara, social fetters could not bind me; and the fetters and chains of religion were no more effectual. I knew something of the terror of God's law. The wrath of God, the terrors of judgment, hell, and endless death tormented my soul, sometimes for months on end. Those terrors would sometimes appear effectual; but those fetters were also easily cast off. The fear of hell never changes a sinner's heart.

## Could not be Tamed

No man could tame this madman. When society sees that chains and fetters cannot bind a man and make him better, it tries by refinement, education, reward, and gentle persuasion to tame him into moral respectability. The Lord Jesus does not bind or tame. He renews, regenerates, and breaks! And when he gets done, the broken sinner rejoices to be broken.

This poor maniac, like me, like some who read these lines, was hell bent to the destruction of his own soul. He was "*always, night and day, in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.*" Imagine the terror that this man wreaked upon others as they passed by this place, especially at night. Imagine yourself living near such a man. You would put iron bars around your windows and doors, and sleep with a gun under your bed every night. Whenever you saw him coming

down the street, you would nod politely to keep from incurring his fury; but you would hurry away and try every way possible to protect your family from the influence of his madness.

But, can you imagine what misery such a person is in himself. His wickedness is his own doing; and it is inexcusable. But I also know the misery of his soul. I have been there among the tombs, moaning, groaning, crying, and cutting myself, always playing with death, yet always terrified of dying, despising loneliness and isolation, yet always doing that which of necessity brought me into greater loneliness and isolation.

Are you like this poor wretch? Were you once like him? If you are now in Christ, saved by his omnipotent mercy and infinite grace, you know that you were once unconscious of such mercy and grace. If you are yet without Christ, you are in the bondage of sin, Satan, and death, though you are completely unconscious of your lost and ruined condition.

## A Worshipping Devil

“When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not” (v. 28). — Here is the confession of a demon spirit. I do not know much about demons and demonology, and I do not want to know much. But I do know this: — Demons are real! You will be wise to stay as far away from the occult, spiritism, witchcraft and Satanism as you can.

Here the devil pretends to be a worshipper of Christ. He does not hesitate to assume the character of an angel of light, when it serves his purpose. I have seen him at work often. He makes people religious and think they have become worshippers of God, though there is no worship in their hearts. What a cunning, crafty adversary Satan is! Many serve the devil best when they pretend to be worshippers of Christ! Worship from the teeth outward is not worship, but blasphemy! Many there are on the road to hell who have nothing but the faith of devils. They know that the Lord God is the most high God, and that Jesus Christ is the Son

of God, but there is no commitment of heart to him as God. John Owen once wrote...

“Of all the poison which at this day is diffused in the minds of men, corrupting them from the mystery of the gospel, there is no part that is more pernicious than this one perverse imagination, that to ‘believe in Christ’ is nothing at all but to ‘believe the doctrine of the gospel!’”

## Run to Christ

Yet, Matthew, Mark and Luke show us in this Gadarene a picture of a poor, lost sinner coming to Christ. I cannot pass this without pointing out the fact that our great Savior sovereignly and graciously used the very devils who would destroy the Gadarene to bring him to him for mercy!

Look at this man. He was “*afar off!*” That is our place by nature. He was afar off from Christ, and the Lord Jesus was afar off from him. In *character* he was afar off. This man and the God-man had nothing in common. In *knowledge* he was afar off. The demoniac knew who Christ was, but did not know him. In *possessions* he was afar off. This man had nothing to offer Christ, no good feelings, no repentance, no good thoughts, no holy desires. He cried, “*What have I to do with thee?*” The poor demoniac was utterly helpless and hopeless.

If you are yet without Christ, no words can paint the picture of your desperate need. You are so far off from God that you cannot and will not, of your own accord and by your own ability, return to him.

Though he was afar off, the Lord Jesus came to him, and he saw him coming! How he knew, I do not know; but this poor sinner knew some things about the One coming to him. I suspect he knew, because whenever Christ comes to a sinner in saving mercy, he makes himself known as the God of mercy and the Savior through whom mercy comes. He saw that the Lord our God is God almighty, the most high God. He saw that the man Christ Jesus is God the Son. He saw that this great Savior has

total, sovereign power over all things, even the devils who possessed him. And he saw that if he would, he could deliver him from the devils and from himself.

*“He ran and worshipped him.”* — The poor soul was in a terrible mess. He was torn by powerful influences. Here is the Son of God who has come to save him. Yet, there is within him a legion of devils bent on destroying him. He loves the evil that is destroying him; yet, he has grown to hate it, because it is destroying him. He did the only thing he could do. In utter despair he ran to the only One who could help him, prostrated himself before his sovereign majesty, and worshipped him. C. H. Spurgeon said...

“A needle will move towards a magnet when once a magnet has moved near to it. Our heart manifests a sweet willingness towards salvation and holiness when the great and glorious good will of the Lord operates upon it. It is ours to run to Jesus as if all the runnings were ours; but the secret truth is that our Lord runs towards us, and this is the very heart of the business.”

Do you need the mercy and grace of God? Run to Christ! With nothing but sin within you, with time fleeing from you, with eternity pressing upon you, with hell gaping beneath you, with heaven above you, O sinner, run, run to Christ! If you would have forgiveness, peace, pardon, and eternal life, run to Christ! This I know — If you do, you will find God your Father running to you in saving mercy, love and grace! When sinners need mercy, they run to get it and God runs to give it!

What a blessed picture we are given of this in Luke 15:20. When the poor prodigal came to himself, as he was coming to his father, with overwhelming shame, we are told that, *“when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”* What a picture that is! The only time in the Bible we have any indication of the eternal God ever being in a hurry, it is here, hurrying to welcome his darling, chosen prodigal home! In a sermon preached almost 400 years ago Tobias Crisp made the following comments on Luke 15:20. The quote is lengthy, but too precious and needful to be

omitted or edited.

“His father sees him first. He spies him afar off. He stands ready to welcome a sinner, so soon as his heart looks but towards him. He that will draw nigh to them that are afar off will certainly draw nigh to them that draw near to him (Jeremiah 31:18). Nay, the father had compassion on him. His bowels yearn towards him, whilst he is afar off. Nay, he runs to meet him. He prevents a sinner with speed; mercy comes not on a foot-pace, but runs; it comes upon wings, as David speaks, *‘He rides on the cherubs, he did fly; yea, he did fly on the wings of the wind’* (Psalm 18:9-10)...The son’s pace is slow. He arose and came. The father’s is swift. He ran. Though the son had most need to run, bowels moving with mercy out-pace bowels pinched with want. God makes more haste to shew mercy, than we to receive. Whilst misery walks, mercy flies; nay, He falls on his son’s neck, hugging and embracing him.

Oh! The depth of grace! Who would not have loathed such a person to touch or come near him, whilst he smells of the swine he kept? Could a man come near him without stopping his nose? Would it not make a man almost rid his stomach, to smell his nastiness? Yet, behold, the Father of sinners falls upon the neck of such filthy wretches! Mercy and grace are not squeamish. The prodigal comes like a rogue. Yet the father clips him like a bride. He falls a kissing of him, even those lips that had lately been lapping in the hog trough and had kissed baggage harlots. A man would have thought he should rather have kicked him than kissed him. Yet this token of reconciliation and grace he gives him, with this seal he confirms his compassion. Nay, he calls for the best robe, and kills the fatted calf for him. The son’s ambition was to be but as a hired servant, and lo, he is feasted in the best robes. God will do far better for a sinner than he can imagine, above all he is able either to ask or think. How then do poverty, nakedness, emptiness pinch thee, because of thy riot? Canst thou see enough in thy father’s

house, and therefore begin to pant in heart after him? Wouldest thou then have admittance? The Father of mercy is ready to deal thus with thee. Therefore object not unworthiness; for who more unworthy than such a son?"

I say, again, run to Christ for mercy; and you will find the God of heaven running to you with mercy, infinite, overwhelming, saving mercy. Oh! That every poor sinner God the Father has given to his Son, whose redemption Christ has purchased with his own precious blood, may be led by God the Holy Spirit to flee to Christ, as this Gadarene demoniac was for deliverance.

## Christ is Lord

Read verses 28-36 again.

"When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not. (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.) And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed *them* saw what was done, they fled, and went and told *it* in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also which saw

*it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed.”*

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the absolute Monarch of the universe. These demons, a legion of them, were compelled to Christ's feet like a whipped cur bows at its master's feet. As they prayed for permission to enter into the herd of swine, so they must receive permission from our Savior to do anything. I can think of at least two good reasons for our Lord allowing the demons to enter into and slaughter the herd of hogs: (1.) He wanted this poor Gadarene to know and remember what these demons of hell would have done to him, had it not been for his divine, saving intervention. And (2.) he wanted to get the attention of the people of the city.

Our Lord's purpose of grace was toward many others in Gadara, others for whom the time of love would soon come. In order to prepare them for what he had in store for them he demonstrated both his awesome, sovereign power over the demons of hell and the creatures of his hand, and his awesome, saving grace in this man who had once been the terror of the city.

*“What is thy name?”* — Our Savior asked this question and compelled the demons to answer him audibly, not for his own information, but for the benefit of his disciples, both those then present with him, and all who shall be his disciples to the end of time. The enemy of our souls is truly a legion. Multitudes of his soldiers reside within us, in the lust of our flesh, and are at his command. But such is the greatness of Christ's power and grace that he has made us more than conquerors in himself (Romans 8:37, and says to his redeemed, *“Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel...Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine”* (Isaiah 41:14; 43:1).

## **A Heaven-born Sinner**

*“Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting*

*at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid*" (v. 35). — What a change! It was a change everyone in town could see. This terror of a man had been born again. He who had been possessed of the devil was now possessed by the Son of God. He who was before uncontrollably wild and wicked was sitting before his Master. He who once roamed about half naked, or totally naked, was clothed.

We were by nature naked before God. Now we are clothed with the very righteousness of God in Christ. Like the prodigal, our Father has placed upon us the family robe of Christ's righteousness, the family ring of everlasting covenant love, the family shoes of gospel peace, and feeds us at the family buffet upon the sacrifice of Christ!

He who was before a madman was now in his right mind. Someone accurately said, "Every man is out of his mind until he has the mind of Christ."

But those who saw what had happened, but had not experienced it, were afraid. When God saves a sinner, others who thought they were all right are terrified by it, especially if the saved man was once one of them. These poor souls were terrified in the presence of almighty mercy, omnipotent love, and saving grace. Why? Because they knew nothing about it. They still lived in bondage. The only difference between them and the demoniac was that they were held by fetters and chains, and tamed by society. They mistook their fetters for righteousness and their tameness for goodness.

Some have asked, "Why did Christ permit the devils to possess the swine?" He did not do so merely to gratify the devils. Rather, he permitted them to possess the herd of swine to fulfill his own purpose. As Satan obtained permission to tempt Job, our Lord Jesus gave this legion of devils permission to enter into and destroy this herd of swine for the good of his own elect, the glory of his own name, and Satan's confusion. Just as Job's trial brought him great benefit and joy, and Satan's confusion, so it shall be with all the works the devil is permitted to perform in this world (Job 1:8-12; Romans 8:28-30).

## Christ Despised

“They also which saw *it* told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again.” (vv. 36-37)

I cannot imagine reading sadder words than these. Here stands in the midst of a congregation of eternity bound sinners the Savior of the world. He has just demonstrated his saving power and grace. Yet, their hearts are so full of the world that they fear he may cost them their living. So they pray; but it was a very strange prayer. They prayed for him to leave them; and he did! Matthew tells us that the whole city was united in urging the Son of God to depart from them (Matthew 8:34). As long as this poor Gadarene was possessed of the devil, he was a terror to them all. Yet, they preferred to have the devil raging among them, to having the Lord Jesus manifesting his grace and mercy!

Do we not observe the same behavior day by day? Multitudes, who hear the gospel of Christ, like these Gadarenes, by their unbelief, say to the Son of God, “Depart from us!” Once, we did the same. Are we now sitting at the Savior’s feet, clothed and in our right mind? Let us ever pray, “Blessed Savior, do not go away, and never let me depart from you.”

## Request Denied

“Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.” (vv. 38-39)

This young convert wanted to go immediately with Christ and become a preacher; but the Lord would not allow it. How many

there are who have mistaken a desire to be a preacher for a call to the ministry. It is not. The Lord Jesus sent him home to his family and friends with a message to deliver to them.

The Master would not allow him to go where he wanted to go, or do what he wanted to do; but he was given something far better, far more useful to do. God made him a witness to his own community. Now, that's a preacher! The Lord told him exactly what to tell those of whom he would be a witness. He was sent to tell his family and friends what great things the Lord had done for him and how he had compassion on him.

And this sinner, saved by the grace of God, did what the Lord told him to do. — “*And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.*” Notice the language here. He was told to publish what great things *God* had done. So he told everyone what great things *Jesus* had done. He knew that Jesus the man is God the Lord. He learned it by experience from the Lord God himself.

The Lord Jesus graciously used this man in Decapolis for the good of many. The next time the Savior came into the region, he was readily received. Many came to him. Many were healed by him. Multitudes were fed by his hand (Mark 7:31- 8:1). Mercy came to many, because one sinner saved by grace faithfully told other sinners what great things the Lord had done for him!

## Something Better

What a wonderful change grace had wrought in the Gadarene! He who was a madman, possessed of the devil, was immediately so transformed by the saving grace of Christ that he desired never to leave his Lord's side. Is this not the case with every child of God, when delivered from the power of darkness and translated from the cruel bondage of sin and death into the kingdom of God's dear Son? Once we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, we cannot but long to be “*absent from the body, and present with the Lord.*” But this must not immediately be the case. “*To abide in the flesh is more needful.*” Saved sinners are to go home to their lost families and friends, and proclaim “*the praises of him who*

*hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.”*

Christ has, by his saving grace, made us members of his church upon earth. In this capacity we are to serve him and the souls of eternity bound sinners, until the time comes he has appointed to take us home. None of us will live here beyond that appointed time. And that appointed time cannot be too long, if God our Savior will be pleased to employ us for the welfare of his chosen. Mr. Hawker wrote, “Let this make us happy in waiting *‘all the days of our appointed time, until our change come.’*” Until then, may God give us grace to make it our lives’ business to tell our family and friends, and all who will hear us, *“what great things the Lord hath done for us, and hath had compassion on us.”*

# Chapter 49

## “They Besought Him”

Luke 8:31-40

“And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed *them* saw what was done, they fled, and went and told *it* in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also which saw *it* told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him. And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people *gladly* received him: for they were all waiting for him” (Luke 8:31-40).

I do not pretend to know much about prayer, though I very much

want to know how to pray. But this I do know: — Prayer has something to do with worship. Prayer has something to do with gratitude, praise and thanksgiving. Prayer is primarily a work of the heart. Prayer has something to do with seeking and bowing to the will of God. It has something to do with the glory of God, the welfare of the kingdom of God and faith in Christ.

I know, beyond a doubt, that most of what men and women imagine is prayer and call prayer has nothing whatever to do with prayer. To all who think that prayer is simply asking God to give us what we want and receiving it, I say, “Read Luke chapter 8.” To those multitudes who vainly imagine that answered prayer is evidence of saving grace, I say, “Read Luke chapter 8.”

Here is a legion of demons praying to the Lord Jesus Christ, a legion of demons whose request the Lord immediately granted. Here is an entire city pleading with the Son of God to depart from their coasts, a city whose request the Lord Jesus granted on the spot. Here is a saved sinner, one whose heart burned with love and gratitude to Christ, who prayed that the Lord would graciously allow him to stay in his company, the prayer of an earnest soul, whose request the Lord Jesus denied.

What are we to learn from these things? Why are they here recorded in the Book of God? May God the Holy Spirit who caused these words to be written now teach us their meaning.

## Praying Devils

*First*, in verses 31-33, we see devils praying; and the Lord Jesus Christ immediately grants the request of a legion of demons. The Lord Jesus answered their prayer, doing exactly what they requested

“And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran

violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.”

Even the demons of hell when terrified by the impending wrath and judgment of God pray; but such prayer is not prayer at all. The very demons of hell are under the command of the Son of God, totally controlled by him, and they both know it and acknowledge it; but such an acknowledgement is not true worship.

As the herd of swine was plunged into destruction by the influence of those demons, the demons who possessed the poor Gadarene, so the influence of hell that possesses unbelieving men and women will destroy their souls, unless the Son of God intervenes.

## Praying Reprobate

*Second*, in verse 37, we see an entire city of lost, reprobate sinners pleading with the Son of God to leave them, and he did. The Lord Jesus answered their prayer, doing exactly what they requested, just as he answered the prayer of the demons who possessed the Gadarene.

“Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again.”

What an awesome, frightful sight this is! At the request of these men, the Son of God, the Lord of Glory, the Savior of the world, “*went up into the ship and returned back!*”

What possessed these men to make such a request? They knew exactly what the Lord had done. They knew his power. They saw the evidence of his goodness, grace and saving majesty sitting before them. Yet, they prayed not for him to work among them, for them, in them and with them, but for him to depart from them! — Why?

These men prayed for the Holy Lamb of God to leave their

city. They begged the Dispossessor of demons to depart from them. They wanted the Healer of men's souls to leave them, their wives and their children. They asked the King of Glory to depart from their town. They prayed for the Savior of the world to leave them alone. — Why?

Why did these men beg such a man to depart from their coasts? Would the Gadarenes prefer to have a wild, demon possessed man roaming their streets than the Son of God? Obviously they did; but why? I will give you the answer in one short sentence: — They loved the world and refused to give it up.

These men were convinced in their own consciences that they would lose much if the Son of God stayed among them. Therefore, counting the cost, they said, "Give us the world! Give us the demons of hell, if you must; but give us the world and leave us alone!" And that is exactly what he did!

Nothing has changed. All men by nature are exactly like these Gadarenes. We all prefer the raging, unbridled, uncontrolled lusts of our hearts, the horrid dominion of Satan, the dark influence of hell, the pursuits and follies of the world to the sweet dominion of the Son of God and the mercy, love and grace of God he brings. As John Trapp observed, "Take up your cross is a hard saying. Therefore Christ must be prayed to be gone, lest all our pigs be drowned."

There is a day of grace, a time of visitation from the Lord, which if despised will become a day of wrath, vengeance and eternal ruin. Light despised will be turned into darkness. Mercy spurned will bring eternal misery. Let us take heed that we do not sin the sin of the Gadarenes (Job 21:14; Hosea 4:17; Proverbs 1:23-33; 29:1). Let it rather be our constant prayer, — "O Lord God, do not leave us to ourselves!"

Yet, even in this, I am reminded of God's great mercy to our souls. Aren't you? There was a time, not long ago, when we, too, besought the Son of God that he would depart from us. Did we not? Thank God, he refused to grant us our hearts' desire. He refused to leave us alone. He refused to leave us to ourselves. He refused to give us up. He cried for us, "*How shall I give thee*

*up?”*

Nothing less than a miracle of grace, nothing less than the intervention of sovereign mercy, nothing short of omnipotent love stepping into our lives could cause us to turn and seek the Lord our God, whom we most vehemently despised all our lives.

## Request Denied

*Third*, in verses 38 and 39 the Holy Spirit gives us another highly instructive picture. Here is a saved sinner praying for permission to ever abide in the Lord's presence, whose request the Lord Jesus graciously denied.

“Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.”

Without question, the man before us is a true believer. He is a heaven born soul. Not only had the demons been cast out of him, the Son of God had established his throne in him. Can you picture him? There he is sitting at the Savior's feet, beaming with gratitude. He is clothed in the garments of salvation, filled with praise. He is, for the first time in his life, in his right mind. This newly regenerate, heaven-born soul was full of love, gratitude, joy and zeal.

Did you ever notice how striking the differences are in the ways our Master dealt with men? To this man he refused permission to forsake his family and homeland. He commanded the rich young ruler to forsake all and follow him. The healed leper was strictly charged to tell no man what the Master had done for him. Another was not even allowed to go home and bury his father. Our Savior knew what was in the hearts of all. He knew precisely what each case before him required, and he dealt with each according to the needs of their situation.

Why did the Lord Jesus refuse this man's earnest request? It was, without question, the prayer of an earnest, loving, grateful,

adoring heart. There was nothing selfish or self-serving in it. But the Master would not allow this man to go with him for good reasons. Our Master knows, far better than we the best place for us. This was an act of great mercy to the Gadarenes. This was a marvelous display of goodness to this man's family. In a word, the Lord Jesus refused to grant the request of this man's lips, so that he might give him the request of his heart (Romans 8:26; Matthew 6:9-13).

By refusing to allow this saved sinner to go with him, the Lord Jesus secured his best place and circumstances in which to glorify God. The Son of God graciously ordered his steps to walk in the will of God (Proverbs 3:5-6). The Master graciously used him to build up the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus graciously led him not into temptation but delivered him from evil.

This young convert wanted to go immediately with Christ and become a preacher; but the Lord would not allow it. How many there are who have mistaken a desire to be a preacher for a call to the ministry. It is not. The Lord Jesus sent him home to his family and friends with a message to deliver to them.

The Master would not allow him to go where he wanted to go or do what he wanted to do; but he was given something far better, far more useful to do. God made him a witness to his own community. Now, that's a preacher! The Lord told him exactly what to tell those of whom he would be a witness. He was sent to tell his family and friends what great things the Lord had done for him and how he had compassion on him.

And this sinner, saved by the grace of God, did what the Lord told him to do. — *“And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.”* Notice the language here. He was told to publish what great things the *Lord* had done. So he told everyone what great things *Jesus* had done. He knew that Jesus is Lord. He learned it by experience from the Lord himself.

The Lord Jesus graciously used this man in Decapolis for the good of many. The next time the Savior came into the region, he was readily received. Many came to him. Many were healed by

him. Multitudes were fed by his hand (Mark 7:31- 8:1). Mercy came to many, because one sinner saved by grace faithfully told other sinners what great things the Lord had done for him!

What a wonderful change grace had wrought in the Gadarene! He who was a madman, possessed of the devil, was immediately so transformed by the saving grace of Christ that he desired never to leave his Lord's side. Is this not the case with every child of God, when delivered from the power of darkness and translated from the cruel bondage of sin and death in to the kingdom of God's dear Son? Once we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, we cannot but long to be "*absent from the body, and present with the Lord.*" But this must not immediately be the case. "*To abide in the flesh is more needful.*" Saved sinners are to go home to their lost families and friends, and proclaim "*the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.*"

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# Chapter 50

## “Who Touched Me?”

### Luke 8:41-48

“And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus’ feet, and besought him that he would come into his house: For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him. And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, Came behind *him*, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanchèd. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press *thee*, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace” (Luke 8:41-48).

Our Lord Jesus was on his way to Jairus’ house to perform a miracle of mercy upon his daughter, who was at the point of death. No doubt, word had gotten around in a hurry about what the Savior had done in Gadara. Therefore, Jairus ran to the Master, fell down at his feet, and begged him to come to his house and heal his daughter. As they went along, the crowds began to gather. You can imagine the commotion.

“And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus’ feet, and besought him that he would come into his house: For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him.”  
(Luke 8:41-42)

Excitement filled the air. Here was a man, who claimed to be God’s Messiah, the Christ, God incarnate. Everyone knew his claim; but he had begun to back it up and substantiate it by doing things that no one else could possibly do. In Gadara the devils themselves were constrained to publicly acknowledge him as the Lord their God, who had absolute power over them. Now, he is going to heal a young girl, whose father was a very prominent citizen in the community. This little girl was at the point of death. Everybody wanted to see the miracle. They followed the Lord as closely as possible, pressing him as he walked along. Everyone was excited. Everyone was curious. Everyone was filled with anticipation.

As they moved along, a poor, stooped, anemic woman, a woman who had been plagued with an issue of blood for twelve, long, tormenting years, made her way through the crowd. I can almost see her. She must not let herself be seen. She is unclean. She has no right by law to even be in the streets; but she is dying. She has heard about the Lord Jesus. No one else could help her. She had tried everything imaginable. Yet, she believed that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Christ, the Son of God. She said, “If I could just touch the hem of his garment, I am sure, he would make me whole.” So she crawled through the thronging crowds, until she got close. Then, weak and trembling, she stretched out her hand in faith and touched the Lord Jesus.

As soon as she touched him, the Lord Jesus stopped dead in his tracks. He felt virtue, power and efficacy go out of him. Therefore, he turned around and said, “*Who touched me?*” The disciples said, “You’ve got to be kidding. With all these people around, you are asking, ‘*Who touched me?*’” Then, the Master said, “*Somebody touched me.*”

Just as this poor woman was immediately healed of her

plague when she touched the Lord Jesus, so sinners are healed of the plague of their hearts, freed from the curse of the law and the guilt of sin as soon as they touch the Lord Jesus Christ by faith.

Because Mark gives us a more detailed account of this event, we will pick up some of the details recorded by him in Mark 5.

## The Curse

“And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any.” (v. 43)

“And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.” (Mark 5:25-26).

There is no greater evidence of the total depravity of all human beings by nature than the fact that we all incur disease, get sick and die. All sickness, disease and death are the result of sin and the curse of God upon the human race because of sin.

This woman’s sickness was a specific example of sin and the curse of God’s law upon us all by nature. Her sickness, her unceasing issue of blood was something that made her ceremonially unclean. So it is with us all by nature. We are plagued with sin. The plague of sin makes us unclean. Being unclean, we are cursed and barred from the holy Lord God. Look at what the Holy Spirit tells us about this woman.

She “*had an issue of blood twelve years.*” She was ceremonially unclean (Leviticus 15:25), because of a disabling sickness that was killing her. This poor soul “*had suffered many things of many physicians.*” She had been to every doctor in town, including the quacks, the charlatans, the snake oil herbalists and the faith healers. There are countless “*physicians of no value*” (Job 13:4) to the souls of men. Dr. Decision tells sinners that they can be saved if they will simply make their decision for Jesus. Dr. B. Good exhorts the sinner to reform his

life. Dr. Free Will admonishes the sinner to will himself into life. Dr. Ceremony urges the poor soul to observe religious ordinances and sacraments to get the grace he needs. Dr. Right Church tells poor souls that they can be made whole if they get into the right church. Dr. Excitement urges the sin-sick soul to seek a miracle, speak in tongues, pray through and wrestle with God until he gets God to save him. Dr. Emotion prescribes introspection, urging dead sinners to look within themselves for feelings of repentance and sorrow, or longings for Christ, by which they may know they are fit to be saved.

Next, we are told that the poor, dying woman “*spent all that she had.*” Like those described in Isaiah 46:6 lavishing out everything for the help of idols, though she spent everything she had seeking help from “*physicians of no value,*” she “*was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.*” Religion without Christ is of no value to lost sinners. It never helps. Rather, it only makes the sinner’s condition worse. The practice of religion without Christ is but eating and drinking damnation (1 Corinthians 11:29). Oh, that sinners crippled with sin, instead of looking to “*physicians of no value*” in tears and attempted reforms in their own strength, might, like this woman, be brought to Christ!

## The Crowd

“And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press *thee*, and sayest thou, Who touched me?” (v. 45)

“And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment.” (Mark 5:24-27)

Like the crowds that pressed the Lord Jesus, people come to

church, profess faith and claim to follow him for many reasons. Some come being stirred by religious excitement, following the crowd. Some take up a profession because of peer pressure. Many do so because they fear going to hell.

The crowds of people thronged our Lord; but only one person gained any benefit. Only one person came from behind and touched him. Only one person in this great crowd needed him. Only one person believed the Lord Jesus could actually cure her of her plague. Believing him, she touched him. Be wise and follow her example.

“Reach out and touch the Lord, as He passes by.  
You’ll find He’s not too busy to hear your heart’s cry.  
He’s passing by this moment, your needs to supply.  
Reach out and touch the Lord as He goes by!”

## The Cure

“And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press *thee*, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.” (vv. 45-46)

“When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in *her* body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?...And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.” (Mark 5:27-30, 34)

There are several things here, which ought to catch our attention. Many reading this story miss the most important aspects of it. They put all the emphasis upon the woman. Inspiration puts the

emphasis on the woman only as the recipient of mercy and benefactor of grace. But, in so far as the act of mercy and the work of grace are concerned, the emphasis must be placed upon the Savior. This woman was made whole in exactly the same way every sinner saved by the grace of God is made whole. She was made whole by a fivefold work of God almighty.

1. *A Work of Providence* — Her sickness was not an accident, but a work of God for her soul to bring her to Christ. That which was the destruction and death of others was for her the instrument of mercy. By his wise, gracious and good providence, the God of all grace brought the chosen sinner and the appointed Savior together at the time of love.
2. *A Work of the Word* — She came to Christ in faith “*when she had heard of Jesus*” (Mark 5:27), not before. No one is ever saved apart from the hearing of Christ, the hearing of the gospel (Romans 10:17; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23-25). God never bypasses the appointed means of grace. There is no need for him to do so.
3. *A Work of Grace* — The grace of God is not verbally mentioned in the text; but it is written all over it. Grace had chosen “*a certain woman.*” Grace brought the Lord Jesus to pass her way. Grace caused her to hear about him. And grace gave her faith and wrought faith in her (Ephesians 1:19; 2:8; Philippians 1:29; Colossians 2:12).
4. *A Work of Faith* — This woman’s faith, like all true faith, was the gift of God. Yet, it was her faith. She chose to come to Christ. She chose to believe on the Son of God. She was made willing in the day of his power; but she was willing. She was caused to come by the sweet constraint of grace; but she did come.
5. *A Work of Omnipotence* — The arm of God’s omnipotent, almighty, irresistible power brought this thing to pass exactly according to his everlasting purpose of love and grace toward this chosen sinner. The virtue that went out

of the Savior to this woman was his own omnipotent grace.

## The Confession

“And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately.” (v. 47)

“And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.” (Mark 5:30-33)

Our Savior did not ask, “*Who touched me?*” because he needed to learn who had done this, but because we need to learn the necessity of confessing Christ before men. “*With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*” This woman came and told the Savior publicly, “*all the truth.*” She told the Lord Jesus all about her plague, the power of his grace she experienced within, and the cure his omnipotent mercy had wrought.

“In the greatest throng, as well as in the secret place,” Robert Hawker wrote, “Jesus sees all, knows all, and both appoints and will sanctify all... We never can sufficiently admire the abundant tenderness the Lord Jesus manifested upon this occasion, to this poor woman. She wished the cure to be in secret: but no! Jesus will have her faith in him made public. His grace to poor sinners shall be proclaimed thereby; and, her trust in him shall make her history illustrious through endless generations.”

It is not needful for us to blow the trumpet in the streets and

force others to hear us when they choose not to listen. However, it is required that we identify ourselves with Christ and his gospel publicly. We must not be ashamed to confess Christ before men, both in believer's baptism and as his witnesses.

This woman's confession did not cause her to be healed any more than the believer's confession of Christ causes him to be saved. Our confession of faith in Christ is not a confession made that we might be saved, but a confession made of salvation granted. With our mouths we make confession with reference to the salvation Christ has bestowed.

### The Commendation

*“And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace”* (v. 48). — Here, our Lord Jesus declares the source of comfort. It is faith in him. He also commends faith, that great work of grace of which he is himself both the Object and the Author. Nothing brings such glory to Christ as that faith which looks to Christ for everything. Nothing is so useful to our souls as faith in Christ. The believer's life is a life of faith in Christ. We begin in faith, live by faith, stand in faith, walk by faith, have peace with God by faith, see the glory of God by faith, and die in faith. Nothing is so important as this — *“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”*

Yet, the primary object of this miracle is not the woman's great faith, but our blessed Savior's great grace. Though at the time unknown to her, the faith she had in him was faith he had given her and had wrought in her by his Spirit (Colossians 2:12). Obviously, the poor soul thought she had escaped the notice of all; as soon as she touched him, the Master let her know that he both knew her need and performed her cure.

Let this be a point of personal self-examination for each of us. Is my faith real? Do I really believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Is this gift of God mine?

# Chapter 51

## “Maid, Arise.”

Luke 8:41-54

“And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus’ feet, and besought him that he would come into his house: For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him.

“And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, Came behind *him*, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanchd. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press *thee*, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.

“While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue’s *house*, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master. But when Jesus heard *it*, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole. And when he came into the house,

he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat. And her parents were astonished: but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done” (Luke 8:41-54).

The two miracles described in this passage are deliberately blended together by the Spirit of God for our learning and consolation. Who can imagine what a great trial it must have been to Jairus’ faith to see the Lord Jesus stopped by the woman? What fears must have risen in his heart! His need was urgent. His daughter was dying. He must have been completely distraught. Yet, the Lord Jesus stopped to heal a poor woman before going to heal his dying child. Often, that is exactly what the Lord Jesus does with us. He seldom answers our prayers immediately or in the way we expect. He requires us to trust him to do what is best. Jairus did just that. What compassion he showed! What patience he exercised! What self-denial he exemplified! What faith he practiced!

I do not doubt that all the time the events recorded in verses 43-48 were going on, Jairus was thinking about his dying child. Yet, he said nothing. He just waited patiently before the Lord Jesus, trusting that he who had moved toward his daughter would heal his daughter in his time. Then, while the Lord Jesus was still talking to the woman, *“there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue’s house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master.”*

Yet, Jairus continued to look to the Lord Jesus. What a great miracle of mercy, love, and grace the Master performed for this needy soul who believed him! His dead daughter was raised to life by the power of the Savior’s word. Death is called, “The King of Terrors.” But here is One who is mightier than the king of terrors. The Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ is he who has

the keys of death and hell in his hands. He who is the Resurrection and the Life vanquished death by his death and resurrection as our Substitute. Soon, he will “*swallow up death in victory*” (Isaiah 25:8); and, just as he raised this young girl from death to life, he will raise all the hosts of God’s elect from death and the grave to everlasting life in resurrection glory.

## Vanity

The first thing demonstrated most clearly in this passage is the utter vanity of all earthly, material things. “*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity! saith the preacher.*” Those are not the words of a frustrated, grumpy old man, but the words of the wisest, mere mortal ever to walk the face of God’s earth. When Solomon considered all the things a man can possess and enjoy in this world of time and space, in this present state of things, he said, all earthly, material things are utterly vain and meaningless.

Jairus was, in all likelihood, a man of tremendous political power and influence, and of considerable wealth. He was “*a ruler of the synagogue.*” Yet, his daughter, his only daughter lay dying. The apple of his eye, the darling of his heart was dying; and she was only twelve years old. Go ask Jairus, “How important is money? How useful is power, influence and fame? If the world were yours for the asking, what would you want now?” He would tell you, I want only one thing. I want the Son of God. I want him to come under my roof, to visit my family, to have mercy upon my only dear, dying daughter. Nothing else matters.

I wonder if we will ever learn that nothing here is really of any value, significance, or importance. “*The things which are seen are temporal!*” Everything here is temporal. Be wise. — “*Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*” Let us ever beware of the “*cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things!*” Let us value nothing in this world more highly now than we will value it when we stand before God.

## Death

This passage also demonstrates the certainty and universality of sorrow, sickness and death. Jairus' daughter was only twelve years old. Yet, she became ill and died. Sickness, sorrow and death are common things that believers must suffer, just as all other people do. Jairus was a believer. Yet, his young, darling daughter was dying when he left home to seek the Lord's help; and she died while he was seeking that help that Christ alone could give.

Like Jairus' daughter, each of us must soon die. We will all die at the time appointed, by the means appointed, in the place appointed. For believers, death is a blessed rest. Our Lord said, concerning Jairus' daughter, "*Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth*" (v. 52). That is the same thing he said regarding Lazarus. In reality God's elect never die. Did not the Son of God say, "*Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die*" (John 11:26)? Those who die in the Lord sleep in the arms of Jesus. Their bodies sleep in the earth; but they have entered into heavenly rest. Yet, for the unbeliever, death is the beginning of sorrow and woe everlasting.

## Prayer

*"Behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house"* (v. 41). — I do not pretend to know very much about prayer; but I know that wherever there is true prayer in the heart of a man or woman before God, it has these five characteristics.

1. Prayer arises from a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. — Mark tells us that Jairus "*saw him!*"
2. Prayer bows to and worships Christ. — Jairus "*fell at his feet.*"
3. True prayer is persevering and importunate. — We read

that Jairus “*besought him greatly!*”

4. True prayer is always importunate and persevering, because it arises from a heartfelt, desperate need. — “*My little daughter lieth at the point of death.*”
5. True prayer arises from a heart of faith in the Son of God. — “*I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.*”

I know this, too. — None of us knows “*what we should pray for as we ought*” (Romans 8:26). We never know what is best. None of us knows what is best for the glory of God, the good of our own souls, or the accomplishment of God’s purpose of grace in Christ. Because we do not know what is best, we do not know how to pray for anything as we ought.

Prayer is not for the gratification of our carnal lusts. It is not the means by which we obtain what we want from the Lord. Prayer, true prayer involves submission to the will of God. It is the cry of the believer’s heart to his heavenly Father to do what is right and best. If I am God’s child, if truly I know him and trust him, I want what he has purposed. I bow to him, surrendering my will to his will, my desires to his purpose, my pleasure to his glory, knowing that his will is best. Therefore, when we pray (in our ignorance), the Holy Spirit cleans up our prayers and presents to the Father the true groanings of our hearts (Romans 8:26).

Jairus demonstrates this spirit and attitude in this passage. He had come to the Lord Jesus seeking that she might not die. When he heard that she had died, he continued trusting the Savior, bowing to his will.

## God's Requirement

Verses 49 and 50 show us what our God requires of us. — The one thing that God requires and demands of us is faith. I am fully aware that faith is the gift of God and the operation of his grace in us. Yet, faith is what he requires of us. He requires that we

“*only believe.*”

“While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue’s *house*, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master. But when Jesus heard *it*, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.”

If we would be saved, the Lord Jesus says, “*only believe.*” If we would honor God, his command is “*only believe.*” If we would see the Lord God work, he says, “*only believe.*” If we would see the glory of God, we must “*only believe.*” In John 11:40 we read, “*If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God.*”

In all our exercises of faith, when the Lord seems to give no gracious answers to prayer, when he brings us into trials and difficulties, when our hearts appear to be cold and dead and our spirits are languishing, let us remember Jairus, and look still to our blessed Savior. It is one thing to trust the Son of God when things appear hopeful; but it is something else to trust him when everything appears hopeless.

With regard to our own selves, when we most feel and know our own impotence before God, the depravity of our hearts, and the corruption of our souls, when we feel utterly dead before him, it is a good thing to have “*the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead*” (1 Corinthians 1:9). In such times let us rejoice to trust him who says to our souls, “*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die*” (John 11:25-26).

## Omnipotent Christ

I am sure the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record this event to remind us that our Lord Jesus Christ is the omnipotent God to whom alone “*belong the issues from death*” (Psalm 68:20). — “*And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called,*

*saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat. And her parents were astonished: but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done” (vv. 54-56).*

In this glorious miracle we are once more shown what Christ can do for dead sinners and how he does it. When God our Savior saves a sinner, when he calls a sinner from spiritual death to life and faith by the power of his omnipotent grace, he secretly, sovereignly touches the dead soul by the hand of his irresistible mercy. He calls the chosen sinner by the power of his Spirit through his Word. The dead, being called by omnipotence, arises and comes to Christ. And everyone who sees it is astonished. The living sinner is astonished. The observant saints are astonished. And the confused religionists are astonished.

### **Christ's Provision**

In verse 43 the Lord Jesus “*commanded to give her meat.*” He said to those who stood by, “Give her something to eat.” Our blessed Savior has provided and continually provides food for the souls of his children in this world, by which he sustains us in life and causes us to grow in his grace. To this end he has given his church pastors according to his own heart, called and gifted by his Spirit, to feed his people by the preaching of the gospel with knowledge and understanding (Jeremiah 3:15; Ephesians 4:8-16).

### **Resurrection**

The resurrection of Jairus’ daughter stands before us in the Book of God as a remarkable pledge of our own resurrection in the last day. As our Lord Jesus came to Jairus’ house and raised his daughter from death to life, soon he shall come again to this earth and raise us up to glory (1 Corinthians 15:51-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

# Chapter 52

## Are there any like these?

### Luke 9:1-6

“Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. And he said unto them, Take nothing for *your* journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece. And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart. And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them. And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where” (Luke 9:1-6).

Along with the ministries of the evangelist, and the pastor/teacher, the New Testament speaks of the ministries of the prophet and the apostle. The prophetic office ceased with John the Baptist and the apostolic office ceased with the apostles. There are none today who have the supernatural gifts of either the prophets or the apostles. No matter what the charismatics claim to the contrary, there are none today who have a new or fuller word of revelation from God. There are none who have the gifts of performing miraculous works and/or speaking in tongues.

Yet, in the sense that the apostles were men who had seen the Lord, men who were chosen, taught and sent out by Christ as his messengers, all true Gospel preachers are apostles, messengers of God to the souls of men.

The ministry of a prophet is more difficult to grasp. It is very hard to find anything being said or written today that is worth

hearing or reading about the work and ministry of a prophet. It is in many ways a mystery. The prophet's ministry is known by all who hear his voice, but a ministry no one seems to have words to define.

It has often been stated that "A prophet today is a forthteller rather than a foreteller." We generally apply those words to preachers as spokesmen for God. But Ephesians 4 speaks of the prophet as a distinct gift of the risen Christ to his church. A pastor is God's appointed teacher in the congregation he serves, God's messenger to that assembly. A faithful pastor both instructs men and women in the Word of God, preaching the gospel to them, and does the work of an evangelist, seeking the salvation of men's souls everywhere, and endeavors to establish gospel churches where none are found.

There have never been many prophets. There are few today; but I have had the privilege of knowing, hearing and walking with two or three such men in my day. Someone, I do not know who, once described a prophet like this:

"The prophet is a voice in the wilderness. It is his business to sound the trumpet, proclaim the ideal, not work on details or set up a program. He does not devise ways and means. Others are gifted along that line. He does not belong on boards and committees. He is a solitary soul and does his best work alone. He is no parrot, puppet or promoter. He is nothing but a prophet; and if he tries to be anything else he is an embarrassment to himself and to everybody else. He is not popular with politicians, either in the state or the church. He is not cowed by dignitaries, and will call Herod a fox if occasion demands. He is an unreconstructed rebel, an odd number in a day of regimentation. He has no more patience with mere religion than Isaiah had when he thundered or Amos when he called on Israel to come to Bethel. It is his business to say what others cannot, will not or at least do not say. The politician has his eye on the next election instead of the nation's welfare. It is possible for a preacher to get his mind on promotion, the next rung

of the ladder, a high seat in the synagogue and being called a rabbi. The prophet has no axe to grind. For him the grass is no greener in the next pasture, nor does he seek any man's office.

We are looking for scholars, specialists, socializers, showmen. We need some seers who, like Isaiah, have seen God in his holiness, themselves in their sinfulness and the land in its uncleanness. The prophet does not pack the house, nor produce impressive statistics. He may get but poor response, but whether they hear or not, his listeners will know that a prophet has been among them. People do not crowd churches to hear prophets. An age of ear-itch seeks not troublers of Israel.

The prophet is not popular with the Pharisees. *'Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?' 'Ye are the children of them that killed the prophets.'* So said the greatest of the prophets to the Pharisees of His day. From Abel to Zacharias, he said, prophets have been stoned while living and honored when dead. Be not misled by monuments; they may be the gesture of one generation to cover up the crimes of their fathers.

The prophet is not popular at home. In all four gospels we read our Lord's pronouncement, *"A prophet is not without honor save in his own country and in his own house."* Strange that any modern prophet should expect to fare better than his Lord.

But prophets do have their reward, and so do those who befriend them, even with a cup of cool water. God will not overlook the *'prophet's chamber,'* where his unpopular servants have been made to feel at home. There have not been many candidates for Elijah's mantle. His path is not easy. There are many ways of getting rid of prophets. John the Baptist's head is not brought in on a charger these days. There are smoother and more adroit ways of hushing up lone dissenters like Micahiah these days. Some can even be promoted into silence. Success

has stopped some mouths when persecution failed.

Like John the Baptist the prophet is out to pull down the high places, build up low places and make a way for the Lord. His business is not interpretation but application. He does not lecture on mustard, he makes a mustard poultice and lays it next to the trouble. Others may comfort when afflicted, but he must afflict the comfortable. We are trying to accomplish now by pep, publicity, propaganda and promotion what once was done by preaching. The woods are full of trained personnel, but none of these things can save us if the prophets disappear.

Any young Elisha in line for Elijah's mantle will need the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child and the hide of a rhinoceros. He may irk those who like to preserve the status quo, for he is a disturber of Israel, but no one else can take his place in the divine economy. There is not much prospect as to pay, promotion or prestige. But there has always been "*yet one man*" who will scorn the hatred of Ahab and seek the honor of God."

Never was the need of such prophets greater and the supply smaller than it is in our day. Here in Luke 9:1-6 the Lord Jesus Christ sent out his twelve disciples, the twelve apostles, as God's messengers to eternity bound men and women, to do the work of prophets. He sent them forth to preach the gospel. These twelve men were the first men to be sent forth in this gospel age as God's messengers to men. The instructions our Lord gave to these men tell us plainly what the work of the ministry is and what is expected of any man God puts into the work. In these six verses the Son of God tells those men he sends forth what those men who speak to men in God's stead must be and do.

## Divine Authority

Those men who are sent of God to preach the gospel are men who possess a God given authority to do their work. — "*Then he*

*called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases”* (v. 1). The power and authority with which God’s messengers are endued is not trumped up authority and power, demagoguery or religious showmanship. Our Lord gives his messengers power and authority, power and authority by which they prevail over Satan, the influence of hell and the havoc of sin in the lives of men. What is this power and authority? The Word of God gives us, very clear answers to that question.

The power and authority Christ gives his servants is the power and authority of the gospel we preach (1 Thessalonians 1:2-5; Romans 1:15-16; Hebrews 4:12; John 12:32).

1. It is the power and authority of the anointing and unction of God the Holy Spirit upon the man by whom he speaks (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).
2. The power and authority by which God’s servants preach is the power and authority that arises from confident faith (Galatians 1:11-12; 2 Timothy 1:9-12).
3. This power and authority, which only God himself can give to a man, is the power and authority of true meekness (2 Timothy 2:25).

The meekness which gives God’s servants the power and authority to do the work to which they are called is not the pretense of meekness that men display and pretend to admire, but the meekness of Noah in his generation, the meekness of Moses before Pharaoh, the meekness of Elijah on Mt. Carmel, the meekness of John the Baptist before Herod, the meekness of Peter before the Sanhedrim, and the meekness of Paul at Jerusalem. Meekness is not an outward show of weakness and humility, but a humbling awareness that we are God’s, that we belong to and serve the living God, a humbling awareness that we have a mandate from God himself. That gives a man power and authority. It is something only God can give.

## Prophet's Work

God's prophets are men who know their work and stick to it. — “*And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick*” (v. 2). I am a preacher, nothing else, just a preacher. I do not pretend to know anything at all about any other man's work. I do not make any claim or pretense of being a man of learning, a theologian or historian. But I do know exactly what God has called me to do. I know exactly what my work and responsibilities are as a pastor and preacher. “*The glorious gospel of the blessed God has been committed to my trust*” (1 Timothy 1:11). It is a trust for which I am responsible. Therefore, I am determined, for the glory of God and the sake of the gospel, to let nothing and no one turn me aside from this great work. It is all-consuming. Basically, it is a work that demands three things.

1. Study – Incessant Study! — A man cannot preach who does not study. Let every man who calls himself a preacher addict himself to the study of Holy Scripture, ever seeking the message of God for his people.
2. Prayer – Fervent Prayer! — Preachers, true preachers, are men of prayer. They do not talk much about prayer, because they are ashamed of themselves in this area. While others talk piously about their “prayer lives,” men of prayer ever beg the Lord to teach them to pray. Yet, they live in unceasing awareness of their utter dependence upon God, seeking grace to honor him, honor his Word and serve his people.
3. Preaching – Gospel Preaching! — Preachers preach. I know this will offend, but it must be said: — God called men are preachers, not social workers, not counselors, not promoters, not entertainers, but preachers! Sadly, many who pretend to be preachers really want to be priests. So they spend the bulk of their time visiting and counseling. Their offices are large confession booths in which they hear confessions of sin and prescribe deeds of penance. That is what people call “pastoral work.” Not so! Pastoral

work is study, prayer and preaching. The very reason the Lord gave his church deacons (Acts 16) to take care of mundane affairs was that the preachers might give themselves relentlessly to study, prayer and preaching.

## Pastoral Care

Those men who are called and sent of God to the great work of preaching the gospel are men who care for men. These twelve men went about serving both the bodies and the souls of men, preaching the gospel to them and healing them. They made the needs of others their own. They hurt for those who hurt. They wept for those who wept. They carried in their hearts the burdens of those to whom they preached. If I am God's servant, if I am God's messenger to the souls of men, I do and I will care for them, their families and their needs, both spiritual needs and carnal needs (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1; 16:1-27).

## Live by the Gospel

Men who are called, gifted, and sent of God to preach the gospel must live for the gospel and live by the gospel. — *“And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece”* (v. 3). Our Lord here specifically forbids his servants to provide a living for themselves (1 Corinthians 9:7-14). There is no scarcity of material in the Book of God regarding the financial support of the gospel ministry. It is a subject which appears again and again throughout the Bible. This is the universal doctrine of Scripture.

Under the Mosaic economy of the Old Testament those who ministered about the holy things of divine service lived upon the things of the temple. Those who served the altar were partakers of the altar (1 Corinthians 9:13). God prescribed by law that the priesthood, the children of Levi, should receive a tenth of all the possessions of the children of Israel, a tenth of their money, property, crops and herds, for their service in the tabernacle of

the congregation. The Jews were required to pay a tithe to be used exclusively for the financial support of the ministry of the Levitical priesthood (Numbers 18:21). Failure to do so, for any reason, was regarded as robbing God himself (Malachi 3:8-9).

However, we are not under the law today. God's people are no more required to pay a tithe in this gospel age than we are required to keep the sabbath day or observe the Passover (Colossians 2:16-23). We are free from the law. A. D. Muse, the late pastor of Hearts Harbor Tabernacle in Louisville, Kentucky, used to say, "If you tithe, you're under the law; and if you don't tithe you're an outlaw." In other words, the person who just pays his tithe is a mere legalist; and anyone who does not do that much is an antinomian. Anyone who uses his freedom from the law as an excuse for being a niggardly miser and selfishly refuses to give of his means for the support of the gospel of Christ is, I fear, without grace. God's people give. They give generously; and they give cheerfully.

The instructions given in the New Testament regarding the financial support of the gospel ministry are unmistakably clear. Those men and women who believe the gospel of the grace of God are expected to support generously those who preach it. Not only is this expected, among God's saints it is practiced. God's children are not miserly, self-centered worldlings. They are stewards who use what God has put in their hands for the cause of Christ. They need only to be instructed from the Word of God, and they gladly submit to it.

Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us plainly and repeatedly that those who preach the gospel are to live by the gospel (Matthew 10:9-10; Luke 10:4-7; 1 Timothy 5:17-18). Those men who faithfully preach the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ are to be supported and maintained by the people to whom and for whom they labor in the Word. Faithful missionaries should be as fully and generously supported by the churches that send them out as the pastors of those local churches.

There were times when Paul and his companions were required to make tents to support themselves in the work of the gospel. It was an honorable thing for them to do so. Paul tells us

that his goal was not to enrich himself, but to avoid being a burden to young churches (1 Thessalonians 2:9), and to avoid causing an offence to young, weak believers (1 Corinthians 9:15-19). But the fact that God's messenger had to spend his time and efforts making tents was a shameful reproach upon the churches. Those churches that were established in the gospel should have assumed the responsibility of supplying Paul's needs and the needs of his companions, as they travelled from place to place preaching the gospel. The New Testament clearly makes it the responsibility of every local church to provide for the financial, material support of those who preach the gospel of Christ.

### Separated to God

God's messengers are men who care not for the world. They are separated unto God and separated unto the gospel. — "*And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart*" (v. 4). They are separated unto the gospel. They seek nothing for themselves: They seek neither their place of service, nor personal property, nor positions of prominence, nor recognition and fame. God's servants seek neither the approval of the world, nor the riches of the world. A prophet is content to serve God wherever God sends him. He is content to live and labor without recognition. A prophet is content to live in this world as a stranger and pilgrim, passing through for only a brief time (Philippians 4:12-13).

### Undaunted Men

Prophets are men undaunted by men. — "*And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them*" (v. 5). They seek to please God, not men. If their work appears to be in vain, they go on, knowing that their labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). They go on sowing the good seed, planting and watering as God enables them, knowing that it is God alone who gives the increase. They cast their bread upon the waters,

knowing that it will return in due season. They preach the gospel faithfully, knowing that God's Word will not return to him void (Isaiah 55:11).

### Used of God

There are really only two kinds of preachers: those who use and those who are used. False prophets are preachers who use men for their own advantage. True prophets are preachers who are used of God for the benefit of his elect. — *“And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where”* (v. 6). The Lord Jesus sent these men to preach the gospel; and they preached it everywhere. The Master sent them out to heal the sick; and they healed them. The Son of God sent these twelve men out to be a blessing to the world; and what a blessing they have been! May the Lord God give such men to his church again, for Christ's sake (2 Corinthians 4:1-7).

# Chapter 53

## “Who is this?”

### Luke 9:7-11

“Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by him: and he was perplexed, because that it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead; And of some, that Elias had appeared; and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again. And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see him. And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. And the people, when they knew *it*, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing” (Luke 9:7-11).

When he had heard of the great works Christ had done, Herod asked, “*Who is this, of whom I hear such things?*” All believers rest the hopes of their immortal souls upon the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. We believe that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:1). He is the Foundation upon which we have built our hopes of eternal life. We believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Messiah, promised by God in all the Old Testament prophets.

Peter's confession, “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matt. 16:16), is the foundation of the entire Christian world, the church of God, and the gospel of God. If Jesus of Nazareth is not the Christ, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures, he is not the Son of God. If Jesus of Nazareth is not the Christ, his obedience to God is of no benefit

to us. If Jesus of Nazareth is not the Christ, his death upon the cross has no saving virtue and we are yet in our sins. If Jesus of Nazareth is not the Christ, if he is not the Messiah, if he is not God incarnate, he was the slickest, most devious charlatan who ever lived.

Our faith says, "*We believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (John 6:69). But are you really sure? There have been many others who claimed to be Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Perhaps it would be good for us to ask of Jesus what John the Baptist asked of him — "*Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*" (Matthew 11:3). Herod asked, — "*Who is this?*"

Suppose you were witnessing to a Jew and he said to you, "Show me from the Old Testament Scriptures that the Jesus you worship is the Messiah." Could you do it? I want to show you from the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph and Mary, who was crucified at Jerusalem more than two thousand years ago, is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God.

To answer Herod's question, look first at Psalm 40:6-8. — "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." It is impossible to honestly apply these words to anyone but the Messiah. Indeed, the Jewish commentators from ancient times have said that this Psalm is a messianic prophecy. And, of course, the Apostle declares in the Book of Hebrews (10:5-10) that this prophecy is fulfilled in the Person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. In these three verses the Prophet David tells us four things which will identify the true Messiah of Israel. These four things find their fulfillment only in Jesus Christ our Lord. Here David tells us that when the Christ, the Messiah comes...

1. The sacrifices and ceremonies of legal worship will cease.
2. He will be Jehovah's voluntary Servant.

3. The body of Scripture prophecy will be fulfilled.
4. He will perfectly accomplish the will of God.

Search the Scriptures and see for yourself that the types, promise, and prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures weave a garment that is tailor made to fit only one man. That man is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. And that man is our Savior, the Lord Jesus.

### The End of the Law

*First*, David tells us that when the Messiah has come all the sacrifices and ceremonies of legal worship would cease. — “*Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire.*” The sacrifices, ceremonies and laws of the Mosaic economy were never intended to be a means of salvation. God never had pleasure and satisfaction in them. They could not remove sin, satisfy justice or make men righteous before God (Hebrews 10:1-10). The sacrifices and ceremonies of the law were only useful as types and shadows of Christ to show the nature and necessity of his redemptive work. Once they were fulfilled they must cease to be, because they have no other service.

The law given by Moses was designed by God to identify and expose sin, to deter men from deeds of iniquity, and to show the necessity of a Substitute. Once the law had served its purpose, since it has been fulfilled by Christ, it has no other use and has ceased to have power over men (Romans 10:4).

The Old Testament Scriptures constantly reminded the Jews that God had no regard for their sacrifices and ceremonies except as they typified Christ and were observed by faith in him.

“And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams.” (1 Samuel 15:22)

“Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will

testify against thee: I *am* God, *even* thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, *to have been* continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, *nor* he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest *is* mine, *and* the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field *are* mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world *is* mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?” (Psalms 50:7-13)

“For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give *it*: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” (Psalms 51:16-17)

“To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*.” (Isaiah 1:11-14)

“And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make *it* desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.” (Daniel 9:27)

These five passages from the Old Testament Scriptures, read without comment, demonstrate clearly that the sacrifices and ceremonies of legal worship were never intended to be perpetual.

They were only temporary pictures of Christ. Even the Mosaic covenant, as set forth in what we commonly call “The Ten Commandments,” was only designed to be a temporary covenant (Jeremiah. 31:31-34; cf. Hebrews 8:7-13). The law of God as a covenant, a rule of life and the revelation of God’s righteous requirements from men was designed to lead us to Christ, by whom it is fulfilled (Galatians 3:24-25). And when Christ came, the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Testament did cease to be observed.

David, at least a thousand years before Christ came, intimated that when he came, he would accomplish that which no sacrifice, ceremony, or law could accomplish (Redemption, Justification, Righteousness and Forgiveness). The laws, sacrifices, and ceremonies of Israel were only scaffolding, temporarily necessary for the building of his kingdom, but now removed. All the Jewish sacrifices and ceremonies ceased to have significance when Christ died. And all ceased to exist when God destroyed both Jerusalem and Judaism in 70 A.D. The priesthood ceased. The temple ceased. The sacrifices ceased. The nation ceased!

Here is the first evidence that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Messiah. When he finished his work, the sacrifices and ceremonies of legal worship ceased. To demonstrate it, the veil of the temple was ripped apart. — *“And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent”* (Matthew 27:51). Though the Jews look for a future Messiah and deny that Jesus is the Christ, their hopes are as foolish as they are vain. — How could this prophecy be fulfilled again?

## Jehovah's Servant

*Second*, David shows us that the Messiah, the Christ, must be a man who is Jehovah’s Voluntary Servant (Exodus 21:1-6). The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world and performed his work as the voluntary Servant of his Father (Isaiah 42:1-4; 50:5-7; Hebrews 10:5-7; John 10:16-18; Luke 12:50).

He who is Jehovah’s Voluntary Servant is Jehovah’s equal!

All angels, men, creatures, devils and events must serve God, because he is the Creator of all things. All rational beings are morally obligated to serve God, because we live upon his bounty. But Christ came to serve the Father voluntarily. He owed nothing and had nothing to gain, for he is himself Jehovah. That Man who is the Christ is himself God (Psalm 45:6-7).

Jehovah's Servant came into the world with a specific mission to accomplish (Matthew 1:21). Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, Messiah was promised, looked for and trusted as that One who would come to restore his fallen people to the everlasting favor of God, by putting away their sins (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke. 4:18). Either Jesus of Nazareth has effectually redeemed and saved God's elect, or he is not the Christ. The Christ of Arminian, freewill religion is a false christ. We know he is, because Messiah's eternal glory and exaltation is dependent and conditioned upon the success of his redemptive, saving work (Psalms 2:7-8; 65:4; 110:3). The Lord God declares of his righteous Servant, whom he chose to be our Savior, "*He shall not fail!*" (Isaiah 42:4). And fail he will not (John 6:37-40; 10:16; Hebrews 10:10).

## Prophecy Fulfilled

*Third*, the Prophet David assured us that when the Christ, the Messiah, has come, the Volume of Scripture prophecy would be fulfilled. — "*Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me.*" These words, "*the volume of the book,*" may refer to the book of God's secret, eternal decrees (Revelation 5:1; 10:2); but they certainly refer to the Written Revelation of God contained in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The writings of the Old Testament prophets abound in predictions of the Messiah, the Christ. God promised Abraham, "*In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*" When Jacob blessed the tribe of Judah, he spoke of Shiloh to whom the gathering of the people would be. Moses spoke of that Prophet whom the Lord God would raise up, whom the people of God would hear. In the Psalms and the prophets Messiah is given a

variety of titles: “The Anointed of the Lord,” “The King,” “David’s Lord,” “The Child Born,” “The Son Given,” “The Mighty God,” “The Everlasting Father,” “The Prince of Peace,” “God’s Servant Whom he Upholds,” “Messiah the Prince,” “God’s Elect in Whom he Delights,” “The Branch,” “The Lord Our Righteousness,” “The Messenger of the Covenant.”

All these names and titles belong to the Messiah. But are they all fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth? If they are, then he is the Christ. If they are not, we must look for another. The prophecies of the Old Testament give us eight specific things which must characterize the Messiah. By these eight things, the Christ is identified. And these eight things can be, with honesty, applied to no man in history, past or future, except Jesus of Nazareth, who is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God.

1. **The time of Messiah's coming was clearly marked out in prophecy.** — God told no one the day and hour when Christ would come. But he did identify the time in history. Those looking forward to the coming of Christ could not predict it. But those looking back cannot mistake it. Christ has come! The coming of Messiah must fit into a very specific time frame. It had to be before the destruction of civil government in Judah (Genesis 49:10), but while the temple was still standing in Jerusalem (Haggai 2:6-9). Messiah had to appear about the middle of Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week (Daniel 9:24-27), which would be 453-457 years after the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem began (33 A.D.), the year that Christ died (Daniel 9:24-27). Thirty-seven years later (70 A.D.) Jerusalem was destroyed. The Messiah had to come into the world during the time that Jesus of Nazareth lived upon the earth. He could not have come at any other time.

2. **The place where Messiah would be born was plainly foretold.** — *“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, (NOT ZEBULON, BUT EPHRATAH!) though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be*

*ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).*

3. The family from which Messiah must come was the house of David (Psalm 132:11; Isaiah 11:1). The Jews debated about many things. But they never questioned the genealogy of the Lord Jesus.

4. And all the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus declare him to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of David (Isaiah 29:18; 35:5-6; 42:6-7; Matthew 11:2-4).

5. The Messiah must be one who comes as a King distinguished by his humiliation, meekness and lowliness (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1-9).

6. It was prophesied that the Messiah must suffer and die by the hands of wicked men.—“*Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself*” (Daniel 9:26; Isaiah 53:1-12). Our Lord’s tormenters used the very words and performed the very deeds he had predicted by his prophets (See Psalm 22). Those words which describe the betrayal, shame, crucifixion and death of the Christ could find fulfillment only in the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

7. The Scriptures declared plainly that Messiah would rise from the dead before his body had begun to decay (Psalm 16:9-11; Isaiah 53:10-12).

8. And the prophets plainly asserted that Messiah,

the Christ, would set up his kingdom among the Gentiles by the outpouring of his Spirit upon them (Isaiah 49:5-6; Joel 2:28-32; Galatians 3:13-14).

Here are the prophecies given by David and fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth, by which we know and are sure that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God:

1. He put an end to the sacrifices and ceremonies of legal worship by fulfilling them.
2. He came into the world as Jehovah's voluntary Servant.
3. He fulfilled the volume of Old Testament prophecy to the letter.

### God's Will Performed

But I have saved the best until the last. Here is the greatest, most blessed assurance we have. By this, above all else, we know that Jesus our Savior is the Christ. — David tells us that the Christ, the Messiah, whoever he is, will perfectly accomplish the will of God. — *“I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.”*

When the Lord Jesus came into this world, he came with delight to do his Father's will. He delighted in that of which God approves. He delighted in that which God had appointed. And the law of God was in his heart, so that both inwardly and outwardly, he was perfectly holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sin. — He knew no sin!

We know that Jesus is Christ, the Son of the living God, because he perfectly performed all the precepts of God's revealed will in the law. — He brought in an everlasting righteousness. He freely yielded himself to all the performances of God's providential will. His life showed his heart's desire and determination, which he spoke in Gethsemane, — *“Not my will,*

*thy will be done!*” Our Lord Jesus made complete satisfaction and propitiation to God’s justice, satisfying the penalty of the law. And in doing these things he accomplished the complete salvation of God’s elect (Hebrews 10:5-14).

Christ came to do the Father’s will. He came to save his people. And he has done it. We know that Jesus is the Christ, because God accepted his work (Romans 1:9-10; 8:32-34; 1 John 5:1).

“*Who is this?*” Jesus is the Christ. We know he is because he has fulfilled all that God said the Messiah would do. — He put an end to legal sacrifices and ceremonies. — He came as a voluntary Savior. — He accomplished all the prophecies. — He performed all the will of God. We who believe know that Jesus is the Christ, because he has been revealed in us by the power of His Spirit in saving grace; and his blood, applied to our hearts, has purged our consciences of guilt before God. We prove his Divinity, Messiahship, and Saving Power by faith. — We trust him. — “*We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God*” (John 6:69).

# Chapter 54

## Healing for All Who Need It

### Luke 9:7-11

“Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by him: and he was perplexed, because that it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead; And of some, that Elias had appeared; and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again. And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see him. And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. And the people, when they knew *it*, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing” (Luke 9:7-11).

### *A Guilty Conscience*

“Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by him: and he was perplexed, because that it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead” (v. 7). — It is hard to live with a guilty conscience. The wise man tells us, “The way of the transgressor is hard” (Proverbs 13:15). Nothing on earth is more persistently tormenting to a man than a guilty conscience. This is what Herod discovered.

Herod was a powerful, wealthy, influential man; but the news of our Lord’s ministry and the great power of God he demonstrated caused that “great” man to tremble like a child. His

guilty conscience caused him to imagine things that terrified him. His numerous guards and fortified palace could not secure him from the fears stirred in his soul by a tormenting conscience.

Though he was surrounded by everything the world thinks will make life easy and enjoyable, Herod was a miserable man. The report of a preacher of righteousness reminded him of that great Prophet's forerunner and filled him with terror. The remembrance of his sin in murdering John the Baptist was a burning fire in his soul that he could not quench. He saw the Baptist's head on a charger day and night; and he could not get it out of his sight. He could not put it out of his mind.

Herod's sin found him out. The prison and the sword had silenced the Baptist's tongue; but they could not silence his voice. It kept ringing in Herod's ears, reverberating through his soul and screaming in his conscience. At this very hour, in hell Herod is still tormented by the memory of that preacher of righteousness whom he refused to hear, whom he beheaded. Here are three mighty, instructive lessons to be learned from this single verse of Holy Scripture.

1. *God's truth can never be bound or silenced.*

The preaching of the Gospel will either bring forth fruit unto life eternal in your soul, or it will be the fire of hell in your soul forever. It will be to you either a savor of life unto life or of death unto death; but you will not silence God's Word (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).

2. *Your conscience is the undying echo of God's holy law in your soul.*

Mock and laugh if you dare; but you know that is the truth. You may never acknowledge it this side of eternity; but you do not even question that fact. You know it is so. Your conscience is

the undying echo of God's holy law in your soul.

If I am not mistaken, conscience is the most powerful part of our constitution as moral creatures. Conscience cannot save anyone. Conscience can never bring anyone to Christ. Every man's conscience is, by reason of sin, blind, ignorant and misdirected. Yet, the conscience raises a loud testimony and protest in the soul against sin. It makes the guilty soul uneasy. It causes the transgressor to tremble. It is the consciousness of guilt and sin that causes all men to fear death, judgment and eternity.

Untold millions will testify in the last day that Herod's experience is their own. Their consciences will call their old sins out of their graves, parade them around in their hearts, and cause them to burn as unquenchable fire in their souls and gnaw as undying death worms upon their hearts!

### 3. There is only one cure for a guilty conscience: — The Blood of Christ!

Nothing can satisfy my conscience except that which satisfies the law and justice of God. Nothing can quieten my screaming conscience but the perfect righteousness and blood atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, blessed be God, his blood satisfies and silences the screams of my guilty conscience. Indeed, his blood compels my conscience to declare me justified (Hebrews 9:11-14).

*“And of some, that Elias had appeared; and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again”* (v. 8). — Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Malachi had all been dead for hundreds of years; but they being dead continued to speak. Their voices could not be silenced. Though Herod was a pagan, though the Jews did not believe them, though the Gentiles held them in utter contempt, those prophets still troubled those who lived as rebels against God.

That old heathen, Herod, when his guard was down, acknowledged as matters of fact that he could not deny the

resurrection of the dead and the everlasting immortality of his soul. Eternal life and eternal death are things inscribed upon every soul. You may pretend it is all fiction; but when guilt rises in your soul and your conscience screams at the prospect of death, try as you may, you will never convince yourself that eternity is a myth.

*“And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see him”* (v. 9). — He whom John the Baptist had declared to be the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Christ, the King of Israel, now began to make himself known as the incarnate God, of whom all the prophets spoke; and Herod was terrified. The Lord Jesus verified John’s ministry so plainly that Herod trembled when he heard of Christ’s doctrine, his miracles and his divine authority.

## **An Accounting**

*“And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done”* (v. 10). — The Master had sent these men out to preach the Gospel. When their work was done, they returned to him and gave an account of all that they had done in his name: the doctrine they preached, the methods they employed, the people who received their word and those who received them not. — Soon, we shall do the same. The hour is coming when we shall return to him who sent us out to serve in his kingdom and give an account.

*“And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida”* (v. 10). — Let us learn what is set before us here. Those who labor for the glory of Christ, the interests of his kingdom, the furtherance of his Gospel and the souls of men must be careful that they make time to be alone with God themselves. This is essential to our spiritual health and well being. If we neglect our own souls, we will soon be compelled to weep with bitter sorrow, *“They made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard have I not kept”* (Song of Solomon 1:6).

Laziness is an abominable thing. It is utterly reprehensible for

men and women to spend their lives in idleness and leisure. Gospel preachers, particularly, ought to devote themselves to the work of the ministry, to study, to prayer, to preaching, to the furtherance of the Gospel. But, we must not neglect our own souls; and we must be careful not to neglect God's appointed means of grace: public worship, the preaching of the Gospel, personal reading and study of the Scriptures, private meditation, prayer and communion with our God

At times, I find it necessary to put my books and my pen down, push back from my desk, perhaps go for a drive, take a walk, or even get away from things for a day or two, to make earnest inquiries of my heart. — “Where are you?” — “What are you doing?” — “Why are you doing this?” Blessed are those Christ Jesus takes “*privately into a desert place,*” that he might minister to their souls' needs.

## The Kingdom of God

“And the people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing” (v. 11). — What a tender, gracious Man our Savior was as he walked on this earth. He was tired. He had labored feverishly. He had now come aside with his disciples for some much needed rest. Yet, when the people followed him, pouring out their hearts' needs, waiting to hear his word, “he received them.” May God give me grace to imitate my Master!

“*He spake unto them of the kingdom of God.*” — If you read through the four gospels again and read them with care, you cannot fail to see that this was always the subject of our Lord's ministry in public and in private. He spoke of the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God. He proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom of God. He declared salvation to be nothing less than the establishment of God's rule in our hearts. Faith in Christ is nothing less than the voluntary surrender of ourselves to his dominion as our Lord and King. It is the willing surrender of our lives to him (Luke 9:24).

## Healing for all Who Need Healing

Next we read that the Son of God graciously “*healed them that had need of healing.*” It is true, he will neither break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. But this text says more. Our Savior “*healed them that had need of healing.*” I take that to mean this: — The Son of God is gracious to all who need grace, heals all who need healing and saves all who need saving.

On this occasion, there was not a single soul in the presence of Christ who needed that healing which he alone could give who was not healed by him. The extremity of the cases did not baffle him. The multitude of needs did not diminish his supply of grace. The weakness and inabilities of the multitude to assist in their healing did not prevent them from being healed. Be sure you understand the meaning of this: — There is still healing for all who need it in Christ!

“Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood  
Shall never lose its power  
‘Til all the ransomed Church of God  
Be saved to sin no more.”

Our Savior’s name is *Jehovah-rapha* – “*The LORD that healeth thee!*” There is no lack of saving power and grace in him. There is no want of ability with the Almighty. Do you need healing in your soul? Many like you have been healed by the Lord Jesus. Somewhere in the Word of God you will find another just like you who was healed by the Son of God. Are you full of great, horrible wickedness? Did not the Lord Jesus cast seven devils out of Magdalene? Perhaps your wickedness seems to be greater than even seven devils. Did he not drive a whole legion of devils out of the demoniac of the Gadarene? You may find that you cannot pray, but he healed one possessed of a dumb devil. Are you hardened and insensible? He cast out a deaf devil. Maybe you think you cannot believe. I assure you that you cannot. Neither could that man with the withered arm stretch out his arm, but he did it when the Son of God said, “*Stretch forth thy hand.*” He can give you faith. Though you are dead in sin, the Lord Jesus can heal still. He raises the dead! — Your case is no

match for his grace. The Lord Jesus has conquered the like before many times.

I know that the Lord Jesus can heal you, because in all the history of the world there is no record of a solitary soul who came to him for healing who was not healed. His promise is sure. —*”Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.”*

There is no question that he can heal you, for this Man is himself God almighty. He is God come to save. He came here specifically to bind up the broken hearted. – Pause and consider all that he has done for the healing of sinners. He earned the authority to exercise almighty grace by his Mediatoral accomplishments (John 17:2).

I know that the Lord Jesus can heal you. I have no question about that, because he has healed and is healing me. The only question to be answered is this: — Do you need healing? If you do, if you need healing, he will heal you. If you need grace, he will give it. If you need mercy, he will bestow it. If you need saving, he will save you.

“To understand these things aright, this grand distinction should be known:

Though all are sinners in God’s sight, there are but few so in their own.

To such as these our Lord was sent; they’re only sinners who repent.]

What comfort can a Savior bring to those who never felt their woe?

A sinner is a sacred thing; the Holy Ghost hath made him so.

New life from Him we must receive, before for sin we rightly grieve.

This faithful saying let us own, well worthy ‘tis to be believed,

That Christ into the world came down, that sinners might by Him be saved.

Sinners are high in His esteem, and sinners highly value Him.” *Joseph Hart*

The Lord Jesus still heals all that need healing. If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, your faith in him is the gift of his grace to you and in you. He has healed you of your soul's disease. You are born of God. You cannot perish.

I once read the story of a man who had been condemned to die by a Spanish court. In the first week of September in 1869 he stood before a firing squad. All appeals on his behalf had been denied. The United States government declared that the Spanish courts had no power to try him, much less execute him. But the Spanish were determined to carry out their sentence. On the day he was to die, the Ambassador of the United States walked out onto the field between the condemned man and his executioners. He wrapped the condemned man in an American flag and defiantly said to the marksmen, "Fire if you dare. If you defy the nation represented by that flag, you will bring all the fury and power of the United States of America upon you." There stood the man. Before him were the executioners of death. A single shot would have been his death. But wrapped in the stars and stripes, he was as completely invulnerable as if he had been wrapped in a coat of steel.

So it is with every believer. The Lord Jesus Christ has wrapped us in the blood red flag of Calvary, and before God's holy law can pierce that flag, it must declare the blood of Christ null and void; and that shall never be! There is healing for all who need it in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

# Chapter 55

## Two Fish, Five Pieces of Bread and Five Thousand for Dinner

Luke 9:12-17

“And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place. But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people. For they were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company. And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude. And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets” (Luke 9:12-17).

This passage gives us Luke’s inspired account of our Lord’s great miracle of feeding five thousand men with five pieces of bread and two small fish. This miracle is recorded more frequently and more fully than any of our Lord’s other miracles. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were all inspired to record it. Evidently, the Holy Spirit intends for us to give it special attention.

The Holy Spirit inspired all the gospel writers to record these stories of our Lord’s dealings with men upon the earth so that we

might read them often, study them carefully, and learn from them continually. His miracles have not yet been fathomed. His words and his ways have not yet been comprehended. Like the cloud that Elijah's servant saw (1 Kings 18:44), these gospel stories seem to get bigger and bigger every time we look at them. Like the widow's barrel of meal, there is an inexhaustible fullness of spiritual instruction in this Holy Book. I read a lot of books. Most of them can be comprehended with one or two careful readings. But the more I read the Word of God, the more I am lost in the richness, fullness, and freshness of it.

I have said all that because I want you to realize that when I have finished this study, there will be much more that needs to be said. I will have only scratched the surface of this deep, deep mine. Having scratched around the surface of this rich mine, I have found four, choice nuggets of gold that I want to show you.

## Nothing Impossible

*First*, this passage gives us a display of the fact that with God our Savior nothing is impossible. Oh, how I wish I could learn this, really learn it. With God nothing is impossible. Our Lord Jesus Christ, he who is God our Savior is God omnipotent! By the mere exercise of his will, he fed 5000 men with five pieces of bread and two small fish.

This is not a fable, or even a parable, or an allegory. This great miracle was performed in public before thousands. That same divine power that created all things out of nothing in the beginning, here made food where there was none.

This was not the trickery of some snake oil huckster, nor the work of some make believe miracle worker. Nothing except the fact that Jesus Christ is God can explain this great deed. 5000 hungry men would not have said they were full had they still been hungry. Twelve baskets of fragments would not have been left over had any of the men remained hungry. The very same hand that sent quails in the wilderness, rained manna from heaven and caused water to gush out of the rock here multiplied five small loaves and two small fish to feed 5000 men.

He who is God our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is King over creation, King over providence and the King of grace. He "*calleth those things which be not as though they were*" (Romans 4:17). With Christ our God, nothing is impossible! When he wills something, it is done. When he commands a thing, it is performed. He creates light out of darkness, makes order out of chaos and brings strength out of weakness. He turns sorrow into laughter, weeping into singing, and mourning into gladness of heart. And he brings food out of nothing!

With regard to the work we are set upon, we might well despair were we not the servants of him who is God mighty to save! When I see the corruption of men's lives and know the depravity of their hearts, when their obstinate hardness of heart is repeatedly manifest, when unbelief appears so firmly and willfully established in the hearts of men, I would be in utter despair were it not for this one thing: He who is our God and Savior is God the Almighty! He is God mighty to save! His power is unlimited. His grace is unconstrained. His arm is mighty. Well might the prophet ask, "*Can these bones live?*" — If God says, "live," they can! Can that poor soul over there be saved? — If God saves him, he can! Can this rebel son be converted? — If God turns him, he can! Can this profligate daughter be won? — If God is set to win her, she can!

It is written of our great Savior, "*Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him*" (John 17:2). We have before us an undeniable proof of our Savior's omnipotence as the mighty God. It was promised by Isaiah that the Messiah would be both a man born of a woman (Isaiah 7:14) and "*the Mighty God*" (Isaiah 9:6). Here is a display of his omnipotence as the mighty God. — With five loaves and two small fish, the Lord Jesus fed 5,000 men, beside women and children. The task was manifestly impossible for anyone other than God himself, who alone has creative power, who alone "*giveth food to all flesh*" (Psalm 136:5).

Let every believer treasure up in his heart these blessed facts. Our Savior, who is full of compassion toward us, is himself "*the Mighty God*," the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and nothing

is too hard for him!

## Faith

*Second*, this miracle is intended to give us a lesson about faith. The disciples wanted to “*send the multitude away.*” They were ready to limit the Holy One. By their actions they were saying, like Israel of old, “*Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?*” They measured the Lord Jesus’ ability by their own ability, or inability. They looked upon the Son of God as Naaman did the Jordan River, with Syrian eyes! Let us learn from their mistake and be warned. When we think of God, we must put down Hagar and raise up Sarah, silence human reason and act according to God-given faith. Faith believes without evidence, and even contrary to evidence, that “*things which are impossible with men are possible with God.*” Two sentences in these verses are bursting with spiritual instruction. Hear these two words from the lips of the Son of God, and ask for grace to trust him.

“*He said unto them, Give ye them to eat.*” — Matthew tells us that he preceded that command with this sweet assurance, “*They need not depart*” (Matthew 14:16). — What a blessed word of grace and assurance! If there was no necessity for these hungry souls to depart from Christ for food, there can never be a reason for you and me to depart from him. There is no need for the bride of Christ to wander from beneath his banner of love. Mary may sit at Jesus’ feet always!

“*They need not depart.*” That means that there is never an excuse for compromising the gospel. There is never a reason for disobedience to Christ. There is never a cause for neglecting Christ, his worship and his service. Whatever we need, our Savior is ready to give to us or do for us (Hebrews 4:16; Proverbs 3:5-6).

“*Then he took the five loaves and two fishes, and blessed them*” (v. 16). — Bring all that you are and all that you have to Christ. He will remove the curse, add his blessing, and make our paltry loaves and fishes instruments of great usefulness and spiritual benefit to chosen sinners in his kingdom. Little is much

in the Master's hands! It has always been God's delight and glory to use that which men consider useless. — He used a baby's cry to move the heart of Pharaoh's daughter. — He used a shepherd's crook to work miracles in Egypt. — He used a boy and a slingshot to bring down Goliath. — He used a poverty-stricken widow to feed his prophet. — He used a little girl to lead Naaman to Elisha. — He used Balaam's ass to teach him obedience. — He used the jawbone of an ass to slay a thousand Philistines. — He used a little child to teach his disciples humility. — He used a boy's lunch to feed twenty some thousand people. — And he uses men, who are in themselves useless sinners, to call out his own elect (1 Corinthians 1:26-29; 2 Corinthians 4:7).

## The Gospel

*Third*, this miracle serves as a beautiful and clear allegory of the gospel of God's grace. We must never attempt to make allegories where the Holy Spirit does not make them. We must never try to make the Scriptures say what they obviously do not say. But just as Paul used Sarah and Hagar as an allegory to teach the distinction between law and grace (Galatians 4), so the Holy Spirit has given us these recorded miracles of Christ to teach us spiritual, gospel truths.

This hungry multitude in a desert place is a good representation of lost mankind in this world. All the sons of Adam are an assembly of perishing souls, lost, helpless, starving, and upon the verge of eternal ruin, without the gospel of Christ. There is but a breath between them and everlasting ruin. Their only hope of salvation is the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:15-16).

The loaves and fishes, so readily despised as being inadequate to meet the needs of so many, might well be looked upon as representing the preaching of the gospel, Jesus Christ and him crucified, which God has ordained for the saving of his elect (1 Corinthians 1:21-23; John 6:33). Like the loaves and fish in this passage, the preaching of the cross of Christ meets all the spiritual needs of sinners in this world.

## Human Instrumentality

*Fourth*, the Lord our God graciously condescends to use human instruments to accomplish his work in this world. No, a thousand times no, God does not need us. He who fed this multitude could easily have done so without the use of his poor, weak, unbelieving disciples; but that was not his purpose. He commanded his disciples to do what they could not do. -- “*Give ye them to eat.*” Then he put bread and fish in their hands and those empty handed men fed five thousand souls! This entire event seems expressly arranged to give us a picture parable of the kingdom of God.

The hungry multitude is a vivid emblem of mankind. — Sinners in this great wilderness, this “*desert place,*” are a company of empty souls in the midst of empty souls, starving for lack of bread, sheep without a shepherd, hungry souls with no bread. But our blessed Lord Jesus Christ is a great, compassionate Savior. — Mark and Luke both tell us that our Lord “*had compassion*” when he saw the multitude before him. And he has given us that which will meet all the needs of men’s souls in the gospel. — The gospel of the grace of God is the bread of heaven. It is the power of God unto salvation.

These disciples, who had the great privilege of distributing the loaves and fish, are representatives of all God’s preachers in this world. — We have no bread; but he does! And he has given it to us to give to men. Our work is simple. The Master says, “*Give ye them to eat!*” Yet, it is vital. Had they not received the bread and fish from the hands of his disciples, this crowd would have gone away hungry. And those who will not submit to being fed by faithful pastors will remain without bread (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 13:7, 17). The preaching of the gospel is vital to the welfare of your soul (Ephesians 4:8-12). See that you do not neglect it.

## All Filled

*Fifth*, we read in verse 17 that all who ate were filled. The

satisfaction of all the crowd and the baskets full leftover appear to me to be a beautiful representation of the fulness of grace to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. You will never go away from his table hungry. Those whom he feeds he fills. When Christ gives, he always gives enough. All who are fed by the Lord Jesus Christ are filled. There is enough in him for all and enough in him for each one. He freely gives all to all who trust him. All who come to him have all they want and need. Finding all in him, we find satisfaction for our souls. Drinking the water that he gives, we never thirst again. Yet, the storehouse of grace is never diminished. He replenishes every hungry soul, abundantly satisfies it with the *goodness of his house*. There were twelve baskets of fragments taken up, assuring us that in our Father's house there is "*bread enough and to spare*" (Psalms 34:7-10; 37:23-26; 107:9; 23:1-6).

Our Savior's name is Jehovah-jireh. He is the Lord who will provide all our needs. Those who serve him will never lack anything because of their service to him (Luke 22:35). And he always supplies our needs to serve him (Philippians 4:19). Our great God and Savior can cause the empty barrel of meal to overflow and the cruise of oil to be constantly flowing. As we use what he puts in our hands for his glory, he graciously supplies us with more to use for his glory. The old proverb is, "Little is much when God is in it." The blessing of Christ will make very little go a long way. It is written, "*The little that the righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked, a dinner of herbs better than a stalled ox.*"

# Chapter 56

## Peter's Confession

Luke 9:18-22

“And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am? They answering said, John the Baptist; but some *say*, Elias; and others *say*, that one of the old prophets is risen again. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God. And he straitly charged them, and commanded *them* to tell no man that thing; Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day” (Luke 9:18-22).

At first glance, the careless reader might pass over these words, thinking there is nothing extraordinary in them; but such thoughts arise from great ignorance. Peter's confession here is truly remarkable. The more I study it, the more remarkable and blessed it appears. Consider it carefully.

This confession put Peter at odds with the rest of the world. Few were with Christ in those days. Many were against him. But Peter confessed him. When the rulers of his own nation and all the religious people he knew, the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the priests and the people, all opposed Christ, Peter confessed him. Many would gladly acknowledge him to be a prophet, even a great prophet, even a resurrected prophet. But Peter confessed him to be “*The Christ of God.*”

This confession of faith came from a man of tremendous faith, character, commitment and zeal. Say what you will about

Peter. He had his faults, I know. But do not underrate this man. His heart was under the rule of Christ. Grace is evident in him. Peter was a true-hearted, fervent, faithful servant of our God.

Matthew gives a more complete record of Peter's confession. Looking in the face of the Son of man, Peter said to that man, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16). Peter confessed that the Man Jesus is both the Christ of God and God the Son in our nature. He confessed that the despised Nazarene is the Christ, the promised Messiah, the One of whom all the prophets spoke. In a word, he confessed that the Man, Jesus, is God come to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). I do not know what all Peter knew or did not know. But he knew Christ and confessed him. Do you?

## Alone Praying

The first obvious lesson set before us is the fact that those who undertake great work for God must spend time alone with God in prayer. — "*And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am (v.18)?*" Never was there a man who worked so feverishly as our Lord. Never was there a preacher who was so constantly engaged in ministering to the souls of men as our Savior. Remember, this man was and is himself God. Yet, there was never a man so much engaged in private prayer to God. How frequently we read in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John that our Lord Jesus Christ was alone, or alone with a few of his brethren, praying.

The pioneer missionary, William Carey, once said, "Attempt great things for God. Expect great things from God." Carey would not object to me adding this: If we would attempt great things for God and expect great things from God, we must spend time alone with God praying. In all spiritual endeavors prayer is the secret to usefulness. Let us follow our Master's example. Pray. Pray for grace to pray as we ought. Pray for one another. Pray for God's guidance and his blessing upon our labors. Pray for the power and grace of God to attend the ministry of the

Word.

## Religious Chatter

*Second*, read verse 19 and learn that talk and speculation about Christ, his Gospel, and the things of God are snares by which Satan destroys multitudes. — “*They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again.*” Many a man attempts to cover his ignorance by endless chatter, speculation and debate, speaking when he ought to listen, attempting to teach when he needs to learn and offering dogmatic opinions about things of which he has no knowledge.

During the days of our Lord’s earthly ministry, if you stopped any man or woman on the street and mentioned Jesus of Nazareth, you would be sure to hear that person’s opinion about him. A multitude of opinions could be heard in any district. Some were dead sure John the Baptist had been raised from the dead. – Others were equally certain that Elijah had come back to the earth. – Others were absolutely positive that Jeremiah or one of the prophets had been reincarnated!

One thing is obvious. All were agreed that our Lord was not at all like the other preachers and religious leaders around. No one ever mistook him for a Scribe, a Pharisee, or a Sadducee! His doctrine distinguished him from all others. Read through the Gospel narratives (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) again. You will find that the masses, religious and otherwise, never denied or even challenged our Lord’s miracles, his doctrine, or even his Divine authority. They did not refuse to acknowledge him as a “Christ,” (an anointed man), or a savior. That which disturbed men in our Lord’s day and disturbs men in this day was the exclusiveness of his message. Our Lord declared himself to be, and his apostles declared him and him alone to be “*the Christ,*” “*the Way,*” “*the Truth,*” “*the Life,*” “*the Door,*” “*the Savior,*” “*the Good Shepherd,*” “*the King,*” “*the Redeemer,*” “*the Son of the Living God.*”

We should never be surprised or at all confused by the fact

that men and women everywhere have very strong, outspoken opinions about Christ and his gospel, opinions as foreign to Holy Scripture as hell is to heaven.

The fact is God's truth disturbs people. No one can sit under the ministry of the gospel and not be affected by it. If the gospel is plainly preached in unmistakable terms, it will cause people to think. If they refuse to bow to the Revelation of God, they will conger up reasons for their rebellion and unbelief, invent doctrinal theories of their own, speculate about what they judge to be right and seek to persuade others.

Multitudes spend their lives this way, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. I meet them everywhere I go. They are always anxious to hear some new thing. They get hold of it, whirl it around, and run everywhere with it, as excited as a child with a ten cent sparkler, until it fizzles out. Then they go find another sparkler.

Multitudes know nothing more about the things of God than what they think they have learned by religious gossip. They content themselves with examining and criticizing everything they hear or read. – “Bro. Mahan is getting a little weak.” – “Bro. Nibert is too strong.” – “Bro. Bell is too emotional.” – “Bro. Fortner is too dogmatic.” – “Bro. Harding is beginning to compromise.” They approve of this and disapprove of that. They say this man is sound, or that man is unsound.

They cannot make up their own mind what is true and what is not, what is right and what is wrong. So they run from one place to another in the name of truth, wreaking havoc wherever they go, never contributing anything anywhere but confusion.

Year rolls after year, and they are in the same state, just as confused as ever and just as dogmatic, talking, criticizing, finding fault, speculating and tearing down, but never contributing. They hover like the moth around the things of God, but never settle down like the bee to feed upon them. They never lay hold on Christ. They never set their faces toward heaven. They never take up the cross. They never become followers of Christ. — We will be wise to read and heed the warnings given in Holy Scripture

about such people (1 Timothy 6:3-5, 11-12, 20-21; 2 Timothy 2:16-18, 21-23; 3:1-9; Titus 3:9).

God's salvation is personally experienced, personally embraced, personally felt, personally known, personally possessed and personally cherished. It is not something bantered about over coffee and doughnuts like politics. It is more, much more than speculation and theory. It is life everlasting in Christ. Our Lord said, "*If any man will do God's will, he shall know the doctrine whether it be of God*" (John 7:17). God's will is that we believe on his Son (1 John 3:23); and believing Christ, we are taught and learn of God. God given faith then walks before God with confident, assured knowledge regarding the things of God, for we who believe "*have the mind of Christ.*"

### Faith's Confession

*Third*, true, saving faith knows and confesses that the Man Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God. — "*He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God*" (v. 20). Peter was, at times, erring and unstable, in some matters ignorant and unbelieving, far too proud and far too quick to action. But when all is said and done, Peter was a remarkable man. In the midst of unbelieving religionists, when the overwhelming tide of religious opinion was rushing the other way, Peter was confident, loyal, willing to stand alone and bold because he believed and loved his Savior.

When he declared that the man standing before him was "*the Christ of God,*" he was asserting plainly that that man was and is the Incarnate God, the woman's Seed, Abraham's Seed, David's Son and David's Lord, the Savior, that One of whom the Scriptures speak.

### A Time for Silence

*Fourth*, in verse 21 we are taught that there is a time to be silent as well as a time to speak. — "*And he straitly charged them, and*

*commanded them to tell no man that thing.*” Many imagine that they must buttonhole everyone they see, shove a tract into their hand, tell them they are going to hell, and in doing so content themselves with being clear of their blood. But there is a time to be quiet as well as a time to speak. May God give us wisdom and grace to know when to speak and when to be silent.

*“And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing.”* — For the present time our Lord was pleased to make himself known to a few and to conceal himself from the multitudes. Contrary to popular opinion, it is still his purpose to make himself known to some and to hide himself from others. He sends the gospel to some and refuses to send it to others. He calls some, but not others, exactly as it pleases him to do so.

There is a lesson here for us all. There is a time for us to speak to men about the things of God and a time for us to be silent. As you endeavor to be faithful witnesses remember this. Ever be ready and willing to speak for Christ regardless of cost or consequence. But seek to be led of God. If he would have you speak a word for him, you will not have to force it. He will open the way and make it obvious. Let our words be words in season and fitly spoken.

## Determined to Die

*Fifth*, we see our great Savior’s loving determination to suffer and die under the wrath of God as our sin-atoning Substitute. — *“The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day”* (v. 22). I am sure there is much, much more in this verse than I have yet grasped. But these two things are both obvious and vital.

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ died as a voluntary Surety.

He died for us because he wanted to die, because he loved us.

He died by his own free, voluntary will. He did not die as the helpless victim of circumstances beyond his control, but by the determination of his own heart's love for us. — The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me! – Imagine that!

2. There was a necessity for our Savior's death. – He “*must*” die.

The Old Testament Scriptures must be fulfilled. The Purpose of God must be accomplished. His covenant engagements must be finished. The justice of God must be satisfied. And the salvation of his people must be obtained. Therefore, our all-glorious Redeemer declared, “*The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day!*”

# Chapter 57

## What is Christianity?

### Luke 9:23-27

“And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and *in his* Father’s, and of the holy angels. But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:23-27).

The words of our Lord Jesus Christ in these five verses of Scripture are solemn and weighty words. They separate the precious from the vile. They are a winnowing fan in the Master’s hand, by which he distinguishes wheat from the chaff. These are words which ought to be read often, prayed over much, and mediated upon continually. These few words define true Christianity more distinctly than all the volumes of theology and apologetics written by men. Robert Hawker observed...

“A single soul is of more value than the whole world; and for this plain reason: The time is coming, when the whole world and all that is in it will be destroyed; but the soul of every individual must live, either in happiness or misery, forever. Reader, pause over the subject, and calculate, if possible, the value of a single soul. The creation of it called forth the council of the whole persons of the

Godhead. The redemption of it cost Christ his blood. The regeneration of it was the work of God the Holy Ghost. The everlasting happiness of it engageth the services of angels and of men continually. Angels rejoice in heaven in the recovery of every sinner. Hell rageth in the event of their salvation. The soul hath a capability of grace here, and glory forever. And therefore what a loss, incalculably great, must it be, that a being of such qualities, and so formed, should be exposed to everlasting destruction.”

### Coming to Christ

Throughout the Scriptures faith is portrayed as a matter of coming to Christ. To believe on the Son of God is to come to him. To come to him is to believe on him. We come to him by following after him, as disciples follow after their Master. Our all glorious Christ says, *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself”* (v. 23).

Coming to Christ is the result of a deliberate, purposeful choice. It is an act of the will. Our Master says, *“If any man will”*. Let us never alter his Word. I know that faith is a gift of God. I know that none will ever come to Christ unless God the Holy Spirit graciously, effectually causes them to come. Yet, it is certain that any who come to him, come to him because they want him and choose him. God does not save sinners by knocking them in the head and dragging them to Christ. He saves sinners by causing them to want Christ more than life itself.

Faith in Christ is not a matter of conscription, but a voluntary act. The soldiers in Christ’s army are not drafted, forced soldiers, but volunteers. It is written, *“Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power”* (Psalm 110:3). — *“Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts”* (Psalm 65:4).

Coming to Christ is an act of the heart, a spiritual, not a carnal thing. No one has ever come to Christ by walking a church aisle, kneeling at an altar, saying a prayer someone taught him to repeat, or signing a decision card. If you would come to Christ,

you must do so without moving a muscle. You must come to him in your heart. Faith is a heart work (Romans 10:8-10). True faith is the willful, deliberate, voluntary confidence of my heart in the power and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is trusting the merits of his blood and righteousness as my only acceptance before God. Faith in Christ involves the willing surrender of my heart to him as my Lord. It is the bowing and submission of my heart to him as my Lord (Luke 14:25-33).

Coming to Christ is a continual thing. Our Savior does not speak of coming to him as a one time thing, as a single act, but as a constant, continual, lifelong thing. Faith in Christ is not an event in life, but a way of life. — *“If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious”* (1 Peter 2:3-4).

Not only are sinners bidden to come to Christ, we are commanded to come (1 John 3:23). The warrant of faith is not my feeling, my emotion, my meeting certain prescribed conditions, but God’s Word. If the Son of God says for me to come to him, then I may come to him!

Any sinner in all the world who will come to Christ may come to Christ. Our Master uses that blessed word of universal application and uses it frequently — *“Whosoever”*. I am so thankful he said, *“If any man will,”* rather than, *“if Don Fortner will.”* Had he said that, I would have concluded he must have meant some other Don Fortner. But I cannot doubt that *“any man”* includes me!

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” (John 3:36)

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”  
(Revelation 22:17)

## Carrying the Cross of Christ

The first aspect of faith is coming to Christ. The second is carrying his cross. This is not an optional thing. Here, and throughout the Word of God, our Master tells us plainly that if we would follow him, if we would be his disciples, if we would be saved, self-denial is an absolute necessity. — *“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”* (v. 23).

Again, this is a matter of personal, deliberate choice. Carrying your cross for Christ is not enduring providential hardships with patience, but deliberately choosing a course that is sure to bring trouble upon you, because trouble lies in the path of following Christ.

Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We are not saved by what we do, but by what God does and has done. We are saved by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-10). Yet, if we are saved by the grace of God, we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God; and we must deny self. J. C. Ryle was correct when he wrote, “A religion which costs nothing is worth nothing. It will do us no good in the life that now is. It will lead to no salvation in the life to come.” If I am saved by the grace of God, I take up my cross and follow my Master. I must take up the cross of his doctrine, the cross of his will and the cross of his honor. Our Savior’s words here are as plain as the noonday sun. If I choose not to bear his cross on this earth, I shall never wear his crown in heaven.

Our Master teaches us that true, saving faith involves deliberate and persevering self-denial and consecration. Matthew Henry wrote, “The first lesson in Christ’s school is self-denial.” Those who deny themselves here for Christ shall enjoy themselves in Christ forever. Grace is free; but it is not cheap.

Faith in Christ involves the total surrender of myself to him, to his dominion as my Lord and Savior, my Priest and King. That is what it is to take up your cross and follow Christ.

Christianity, true Christianity, true saving faith involves a total surrender to Christ the Lord. Either you will be a servant under the dominion of King Jesus, voluntarily giving up all to his claims, or you will go to hell. You may not have to give up anything in actuality. But surrender to Christ must be just as real and complete in your heart as if you had actually given up everything, even down to life itself. Our Lord Jesus Christ requires total and unreserved surrender to himself. Christ will be Lord of all, or he will not be Lord at all. Is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, your Lord? Is he truly your Lord?

But we must never imagine that this is a matter dealt with only in the initial experience of grace and in the initial act of faith. Here our Lord Jesus addresses these words to men who had been his faithful disciples for a long time. How graciously he warns us and teaches us to guard against the terrible tendency of our sinful flesh to rebel against his rule and his will. How much evil we bring upon ourselves by our carnal misapprehensions! We are all, like Peter (v. 33; Mark 8:33), inclined to judge things by our emotions, personal desires and carnal reason. We must not do so. Rather, we must seek grace to know and bow to the will of God our Savior in all things. Oh, for grace to savor the things which are of God, and not those which are of men!

### **Consecration to Christ.**

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?” (vv. 24-25)

Faith is coming to Christ, carrying the cross of Christ and consecration to Christ. If I would save my life, I must lose it to Christ. I repeat myself deliberately. — Salvation is neither more nor less than surrender to the rule and reign of Jesus Christ as my

## Lord and King.

“And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:25-33)

Faith in Christ is giving over the rule of your life to Christ; but that is no great sacrifice at all. — “*For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?*” That question is so well known and so often repeated that I fear that few take it to heart. It ought to sound in our ears like a trumpet, whenever we are tempted to neglect our eternal interests. Each of us has an immortal soul, a soul that will live forever, either in the bliss of eternal life or in the torments of eternal death. There is nothing the world can offer, nothing money can buy, nothing a man can give, nothing to be named in comparison with our souls. We live in a world where everything is temporal. We are going to a world where everything is eternal. Let us count nothing here more valuable than we shall when we have to leave it forever!

It is a very easy thing for you to lose your soul. You can murder it, by loving and clinging to the world. You can poison it with the deadly wine of false, freewill works religion. You can

starve it, by neglecting God's ordained means of grace, the preaching of the gospel, by keeping from it the Bread of Life, by the neglect of prayer, the neglect of worship and the neglect of God's Word. There are many ways to hell. Which way you choose is a matter for which you alone are responsible (Proverbs 16:25). But there is only one way to life eternal. Christ is that Way.

## Confessing Christ

Faith in Christ involves coming to Christ, carrying the cross of Christ, consecration to Christ, and confessing Christ. — “For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels. But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God” (vv. 26-27).

Who is capable of being ashamed of Christ and his words? None among the sons of men can be compared to him. We do not have to guess what it is to be ashamed of Christ. It is to refuse to confess him, to refuse to identify ourselves with him. Every son and daughter of Adam show themselves ashamed of him and his gospel who refuse to seek salvation in his name, trusting him alone as Savior and Lord. All who seek to add their own works to his righteousness and his precious blood for acceptance with God prove themselves ashamed of him. To refuse to trust the Lord Jesus Christ is to deny him. That is what it is to be ashamed of him.

If you are ashamed of Christ's doctrine, you are ashamed of him (Romans 1:16-17). If you are ashamed of Christ's ordinances, you are ashamed of him. If you are ashamed of Christ's people, ashamed to identify yourself with them, you are ashamed of him. If you are ashamed of Christ in this adulterous and sinful generation, he will be ashamed of you when he comes in the glory of his Father with his holy angels to judge the world.

“Jesus! and shall it ever be  
A mortal man ashamed of Thee?”

Ashamed of Thee, whom angels praise,  
Whose glories shine through endless days?

Ashamed of Jesus? Sooner far  
Let evening blush to own a star.  
He sheds the beams of light divine  
O'er this benighted soul of mine.

Ashamed of Jesus? Just as soon  
Let midnight be ashamed of noon.  
'Tis midnight with my soul till He,  
Bright Morning Star, bids darkness flee.

Ashamed of Jesus, that dear Friend  
On whom my hopes of heaven depend?  
No; when I blush, be this my shame,  
That I no more revere His name.

Ashamed of Jesus? Yes, I may  
When I've no guilt to wash away,  
No tears to wipe, no joys to crave,  
No fears to quell, no soul to save.

Till then, nor is the boasting vain,  
Till then I boast a Savior slain.  
And oh, may this my portion be,  
That Christ is not ashamed of me!"

# Chapter 58

## The Transfiguration – A Glimpse of Glory

Luke 9:28-36

“And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment *was white and* glistening. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said. While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept *it* close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen” (Luke 9:28-36).

We commonly refer to that which is described in these verses as “the transfiguration.” It is one of the most remarkable events in the history of our Lord’s earthly ministry. Here the Holy Spirit lifts the corner of the veil which yet hangs over the world to

come and gives us a glimpse of the glory which awaits us.

When the angel appeared to John he said, “*Come up hither.*” He was about to see and enter into things he had never seen or experienced before. The holy Lord God was about to bring him experimentally near to himself, about to make such great manifestations of himself, his glory, his grace and his purpose in his Son as John had never known before. John saw a door open in heaven and was bidden, as it were, to enter into heaven itself for a while, though he was yet on the earth.

That is the position we are in as we come to the Mount of Transfiguration. Standing before this awesome, majestic passage of Scripture, we hear the Spirit of God saying, “*Come up hither;*” leave your worldly thoughts; and, for a little while, forget the earth. May God the Spirit graciously enable us to ascend “*the holy mount,*” as Peter calls it, and see, and learn, and experience what those chosen disciples did on that day. Let us, as it were, go up on Pisgah’s mount, and take a view of the Promised Land awaiting us.

It is true, indeed, eye has not seen, ear has not heard, neither has it entered into the heart of any man to conceive the great and good things which God has prepared for his people even here on earth, much less, those infinitely greater and more gloriously good things that he has laid up for us in the world to come. Yet, God has been pleased to leave upon record this magnificent event that we may form some faint idea of that glory that awaits us in his kingdom above.

## The Connection

When we observe the fact that there is a clear, intended connection between verses 27 and 28, it is obvious that this event is recorded to give us a glimpse of heavenly glory. In verse 27 the Lord Jesus declared, “*I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.*” Then, in verse 28 we read, “*And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.*”

That which came to pass in verse 28 is that which our Lord had spoken of about eight days earlier in verse 27. This was obviously what our Lord had in mind when he promised that some standing before him at that time would see the kingdom of God before they tasted death. He had been speaking about the glory of his coming and of his kingdom. Knowing that in their weakness his disciples might think, “This is too good to be true,” the Master promised that he would give some of those very disciples, (Peter, James and John), a glimpse of that glory.

### The Chosen Three

All three of the accounts given of this great event tell us that the Lord Jesus took Peter, James and John with him into the mount to see his transfiguration. Why do you suppose he did not take more of the disciples with him? Why just three? Why these three? The Master was pleased to take three and no more to show us his sovereignty. Our God always keeps before us the fact that he is absolutely sovereign in all things. He is sovereign in the election of some to salvation (Ephesians 1:3-6), sovereign in the redemption of his elect by Christ (Isaiah 53:4-10), sovereign in calling of his elect by the irresistible grace of his Spirit (Psalm 63:5; 110:3), sovereign in the revelation of his grace (Galatians 1:15-16), sovereign in the bestowment of the blessings and gifts of his grace (1 Corinthians 4:7), and sovereign in his sweet visitations of mercy (Romans 9:16).

Our Lord took three rather than one, because three were sufficient to verify the truthfulness of this event. — *“In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.”* He took no more than three, because these three were enough. And he took these three, Peter, James and John in particular, because they would be the same three who were later to see him agonizing in the garden, sweating great drops of blood falling unto the ground. Seeing him in his glory helped to prepare them for that day when they would see him in his humiliation and agony of heart.

## The God-man in Prayer

Our Lord Jesus took Peter, James and John “*up into a mountain to pray.*” He had no corruption to acknowledge or sins to confess. Yet, our Master was a man of prayer. Often, he rose to pray, went aside to pray, and at least once spent an entire night in prayer. What an example he left for us to follow! — “*In the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, our great Savior was heard in that he feared*” (Hebrews 5:7). If we would serve our God, seek his glory, do his will, and serve the souls of men, we must learn something about prayer, seeking the honor and glory of God, the will of God, and the interests of the kingdom of God.

Our Savior began, it seems, every work he undertook for the glory of God in prayer. When he came to be baptized by John the Baptist, at his baptism, he was engaged in prayer. When he went into the wilderness to meet Satan in his great temptation, he fasted and prayed. When he was transfigured, as a pledge of his exaltation and glory, he prayed. When he was about to go to Calvary to die as our Substitute, he prayed. On both occasions when God the Father spoke from heaven and declared, “*This is my beloved Son,*” our Master was engaged in prayer.

“*And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering*” (v. 29). — Here we see the result of our Lord’s praying. There is an obvious emphasis here upon the fact that our Lord was transfigured as he was praying. You will recall that when Moses went up to the mount of God and God spoke to him face to face, as he came down from the mount Moses’ face shined so brightly that he had to put a veil over his face. The shining of his face was a proof to the people that he had been talking with God. After that, Moses told the people that the Lord would raise up unto them a prophet like unto him, whom the people were to hear (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). Christ is that Prophet! God the Father, in order to give his Son confirmation as that prophet, not only caused his face to glitter or shine, but, also, to show that he was a prophet far greater than Moses, made his very garment white and glittering,

and “*his countenance did shine as the sun.*” What a thing to see!  
What a change!

## Moses, Elijah and the Savior

“*And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem*” (vv. 30-31). — What a sight that must have been! Peter, James and John must have been utterly astounded! I am sure there is much, much more in these two verses than I have yet understood; but the things the Holy Spirit intends for us to learn from them appear to me to be obvious. He seems particularly to call our attention to three things.

1. **Their Descent** — “*There talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elijah.*” – Moses and Elijah descended from heaven and spoke to The Lord Jesus in the hearing of Peter, James and John. Moses had been dead for 1500 years. Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, in a chariot of fire, 900 years earlier. Yet, both stood upon the mount with the Lord Jesus, Peter, James and John. The very fact that these two men stood physically with our Lord on the mount and spoke audibly to him is instructive.

*First*, it tells us that our departed brethren are, indeed, alive and well. *Second*, Moses and Elijah are specific representatives of all the law and the prophets. Both acknowledged our Savior as the Christ of God, of whom all the law and prophets speak. — “*To him give all the prophets witness.*” *Third*, Moses and Elijah are representative of the saints who will appear with Christ in his glory at his second advent. – Moses represents all God’s elect whose bodies are in the grave. – Elijah represents those who are found alive upon the earth at the Lord’s coming, who shall be “*caught up to meet the Lord in the air*” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Blessed be God, there is a world above. All is not over when we have drawn our last breath here. We will live beyond the grave. There is a resurrection day coming. Until that day, our

departed friends are safe with the Savior! They are in good keeping. Christ is taking care of them. They are in good company. They are with him! They are not lost, but have gone before us; and the Lord Jesus will bring them with him when he comes again.

*Fourth*, the fact that Moses and Elijah were immediately recognized by these three disciples, though they had never seen either of them, makes it obvious that God's saints shall know one another in glory, intuitively and by special revelation. — How dim our present vision is of things to come!

*Fifth*, the fact that Moses and Elijah spoke with the Lord Jesus about "*his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem*" tells us that God's saints in heaven are very much aware of and interested in that which God's saints are doing on the earth. They are that "*great cloud of witnesses*" spoken of in the Book of Hebrews.

**2. Their Dress** — "*They appeared in glory.*" — Moses and Elijah seem to have appeared in the very same glory as that in which the Lord Jesus appeared. While that may or may not have been the case, this much is certain: — When the Lord God has at last brought us into glory at the last day, the glory which Christ now enjoys as our God-man Mediator shall be ours (John 17:5 and 20; Romans 8:28-29). — In heavenly glory all God's saints shall possess the same glory!

**3. Their Discourse** — "*They spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.*" — What language that is! Moses and Elijah spoke of our Lord's death at Jerusalem as "*his decease*" (his exodus) "*which he should accomplish.*" Never was any other man's death spoken of as a thing that he accomplished. The word really means "fulfil." Our Lord's death was something he accomplished by which he fulfilled God's law and justice, all the types and prophecies of the Old Testament, his mission as our Substitute and Surety, and the everlasting redemption of his elect.

The saints in glory speak much about that decease which our Lord Jesus accomplished at Jerusalem (Revelation 5, 7 and 14). They know its meaning. They know what depended upon it. They

know what was accomplished by it. They know that they are there because of it, only because of it. The saints in glory see such magnificent beauty in the death of God's darling Son that they must talk much about it; how much more should saved sinners upon the earth be utterly consumed with it. This is our only hope. This is our only peace. This is our only message to poor, lost sinners. — Redemption is accomplished, finished by the Lord Jesus Christ!

## The Disciples

The appearance of Moses and Elijah with Christ in glory, the transfiguration they observed, and the conversation they heard had an overwhelming effect upon our Lord's disciples. — "*But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him*" (v. 32). Peter, James and John have been unjustly accused of being bored in prayer, even as the Lord Jesus was transfigured before them, and Moses and Elijah spoke to him of his death at Jerusalem. But that was not the case at all. The sleep spoken of here was not that kind of sleep. Rather, it was a sleep of an almost unconscious state of one utterly overwhelmed, shocked, dumbfounded by something before him. If you will look at the cross reference in the margin of your Bible, you will see that this is exactly what happened to Daniel when Gabriel appeared to him and when Christ himself appeared to him in the form of a man (Daniel 8:18; 10:9).

Peter, James and John were overcome by the sight of the glory of Christ's garments, the glittering of his body, the glory in which Moses and Elias appeared, and the things they heard. Like the Queen of Sheba, when she saw Solomon's glory, they had no life in them. But they quickly recovered. — "*When they were awake,*" that is, when they had recovered their strength, when God had put renewed strength into them, as the angel put strength into Daniel, "*they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.*"

*"And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said*

*unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said*" (v. 33). — Peter, who was always the first to speak, when he had drank a little of Christ's new wine, spoke like a person intoxicated. He was overpowered with the brightness of the manifestation. "*Let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*" It is well added, "*not knowing what he said.*" That he should cry out, "*Master, it is good for us to be here,*" in such good company and in so glorious a condition, is no surprise. Which of us would not have done the same? But to talk of building tabernacles, one for Christ, one for Moses and one for Elias, was saying something for which Peter himself must stand reproved. He was so high on the mountain that his head was spinning.

Still, as always with Peter, there was something in this that revealed the manly honesty and integrity of his heart. Peter knew that the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle and the temple of old. Now that the Lord Jesus is transfigured, and Moses and Elias appeared with him in glory, he thought it only proper that new tabernacles should be erected for them. George Whitefield said, concerning this incident...

"Such a mixture of nature and grace, of short-sightedness and infirmity, is there in the most ardent and well-meant zeal of the very best of men, when nearest the throne of grace, or even upon the mount with God. Perfection in any grace must be looked for, or expected, only among the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven. Those who talk of any such thing on earth, like Peter, they know not what they say."

No doubt, there is much to be blamed in Peter's outburst; but there is much to be admired. When Peter saw the Lord Jesus in his glory, surrounded by such companions, knowing that he had said he was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die, when he had but a glimpse of glory, he said, "*It is good for us to be here.*" Oh, how indescribably good it will be for us to be there, with Christ and all who are his in heavenly glory!

*"While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed*

*them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud*" (v. 34). — Matthew tells us it was a bright cloud, not dark like that on Mount Sinai, but bright, because the gospel opens to us a far brighter dispensation than that of the law. This cloud was like the veil thrown on the face of Moses, and prepared them for the voice which they were soon to hear coming out of it.

Both Matthew and Luke tell us that they feared as they entered into the cloud. Mark says, "*they were sore afraid.*" Since the fall of our father Adam, there is such a consciousness in us all of guilt and deserved wrath that we cannot help fearing when we enter into a cloud, though Jesus Christ himself be in the midst of it. How quickly those fears were dispelled. How soon is the tumult of their minds hushed and calmed, with that soul-reviving voice that came from the excellent glory.

### A Voice from Heaven

*"And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him"* (v. 35). — Matthew adds, "*in whom I am well pleased.*" God the Father hereby gives Moses and Elias a solemn discharge, as though they were sent from heaven on purpose to give up their commission to their rightful Lord, and like the morning star, disappear when the Sun of Righteousness himself arises to bring in the Gospel Day. — "*This is my beloved Son, hear him.*" Understand what the God of heaven declared in those words: — This Man is "*my beloved Son.*" He is God incarnate! — This Representative Man, this Surety, this Mediator is the One "*in whom (alone) I am well pleased!*" The Triune God is well-pleased with the Lord Jesus Christ as the Representative of his elect; and he is well-pleased with all his elect in his Son! — "*Hear Him!*" "*Hear ye him.*" Believe on, love, serve and obey him. "*Hear him.*" Hear what he says, for he comes with a commission from above. Hear his doctrine. Obey his Word. Follow his example. Christ alone is our Master. Christ alone we must hear!

We are repeatedly told that the Lord God declared himself well pleased in Christ our Redeemer (Matthew 3:17; 12:18; 17:5;

Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; 2 Peter 1:17). The Lord God intends for us to hear and understand this wondrous declaration of mercy. God the Father speaks from heaven to Peter, James and John, and by them to us, declaring that he is well pleased with his dear Son, and only with his Son. Moses was there; but God was not pleased with him. Elijah was there; but God was not pleased with him. Peter was there; but God was not pleased with him. James was there; but God was not pleased with him. And John was there; but God was not pleased with him. God never has been and never can be pleased with any sinful man. But God always has been and always must be well pleased with his dear Son, the God-man.

It goes without saying that God the Father is essentially well pleased with his Son as his Son. But here we are told that God the Father is well pleased with his Son as the God-man Mediator. God was well pleased with his Son eternally as our Surety and Mediatorial Representative in the covenant of grace (Isaiah 42:21). He is well pleased, honored by, and delights in the representative life of his Son, by which he brought in everlasting righteousness for us (Matthew 3:13-17). God is well pleased with the substitutionary, sin atoning death of his Son, by which he both satisfied divine justice and put away the sins of his people (Isaiah 53:10; Psalm 85:9-11). He is well pleased with the heavenly intercession of his Son as our Advocate and great High Priest (1 John 2:1-2). God is well pleased with the providential rule of his Son as the sovereign King of the universe (Isaiah 42:1-4). As our Savior said of his earthly life, he might say of his heavenly rule, "*I do always those things that please him*" (John 8:29). And God shall be well pleased with the results of his Son's covenant engagements and mediatorial rule (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Christ, as the Mediator, as the God-man, shall present his kingdom to the eternal Father, that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit may be forever glorified (Revelation 19:1-7).

But the voice that was heard from heaven did not say, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased," but "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*" God is well pleased with his people in his Son. Imagine that! The holy, righteous, just, and true God, Lord of heaven and earth, is honored by, delights in, and well pleased with us in his Son! In our natural

condition we are all displeasing to God. This is our miserable state by nature. But our God is well pleased with us for Christ's sake, because he is in Christ. He was well pleased with us in Christ eternally (Ephesians 1:6). He is well pleased with all that we offer to him and do for him in Christ (1 Peter 2:5). And he is always, immutably well pleased with us in Christ (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16).

*“And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen”* (v. 36). — Let me call your attention to just two things here.

*First*, the fact that Moses and Elijah were gone and the Lord Jesus stood before these disciples alone was a vivid declaration that he is the end of the law and the fulfillment of the prophets, and the message of both the law and the prophets. — When Peter, James and John awoke, when they saw clearly and distinctly, they saw *“no man, save Jesus only!”* Blessed, indeed, are those chosen, redeemed, called men and women who see no man's hand in the whole affair of salvation, except the hand of Christ.

*Second*, the disciples told this to no one until after the resurrection. If we compare verse 36 with the records of Matthew and Mark, we see that this was done by Christ's order: Peter, James and John would otherwise have gone down and told the whole world that they had seen the Lord Christ upon the mount of transfiguration; but our Lord ordered them to keep it silent. Why? — If they had gone down from the mount and told it to the other disciples, it might have stirred jealousy and strife among the believers. Besides, the Lord had declared that he would give no signs to that generation. They must believe him and his word, or they must perish. And, had they told others about this before the resurrection, Peter, James and John would have appeared utterly foolish in the eyes of any who did not believe their testimony. By keeping it secret until after his resurrection, until he had broken the gates of death, the things they witnessed upon the mount were credible in the eyes of others. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. Our Lord would not have us cast our pearls before swine.

## Eternity

As there is life beyond the grave for the righteous, so there is death beyond the grave for the wicked. As the righteous shall know one another in glory, so the damned shall know one another in hell. As our knowing one another in heaven will make heaven more blessed, so the wicked knowing one another in hell will make hell more horrible and tormenting.

We have a glimpse of glory before us in the transfiguration. When Christ comes to gather us home, we shall be like him upon the mount of transfiguration: — Wonderfully Changed! — Wonderfully Owned! — Wonderfully Approved!

# Chapter 59

## When They Came Down

Luke 9:37-45

“And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met him. And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is mine only child. And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him. And I besought thy disciples to cast him out; and they could not. And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you? Bring thy son hither. And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare [him]. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father. And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying” (Luke 9:37-45).

When our Lord Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, he found his disciples being harassed by the scribes, apparently because they were not able to perform the miracle of casting out the demon which possessed a young man who was brought to them. When the Lord Jesus saw what was going on, he immediately stepped in to defend the nine disciples

who were baffled by their inability to perform this miracle and baffled by the learned scribes who were disputing with them. He asked the scribes why they were disputing with (questioning) his disciples. But, before the scribes said anything, before any of the disciples said anything, a man butted into the conversation (Mark 9:14-29). Normally, in polite society, such an intrusion is looked upon as rudeness and is disdained. However, this man's intrusion was most welcome, because it was the intrusion of a desperate, loving father for his demon possessed son.

This poor man cared nothing for the dispute between the scribes and our Master's disciples. His son was possessed of the devil! His son was pining away under satanic influence. His son was perishing and he was helpless! Therefore, he came directly, as soon as he had opportunity, to the only One who could help. He brought his son to the Son of God, seeking mercy, grace and life for his son by the power of our great and glorious Savior.

## **Mountains and Valleys**

The first thing I see in this passage is the fact that mountain top experiences seldom last very long. The contrast between this paragraph and the one preceding it is very striking and must not be overlooked. We move from the Mount of Transfiguration to the valley of sorrow, from the vision of Christ's glory to a sad, sad history of Satan's power and influence in the life of one young man.

Peter, James and John had been in the blessed company of Moses and Elijah. They had just heard God the Father speak from heaven. They had just seen the Son of God transfigured before their eyes. Now they come into the scene of conflict, pain, weakness and misery. Here is a boy in agony, tormented by the devil. Here is a father with a broken heart, in deep distress. Here is a band of weak disciples, baffled by Satan's power and unable to help.

That is a fairly vivid picture of every Christian's life in this world. Mountain top experiences are delightful, blessed times; but we must not expect them too often or expect too many of

them. Most of the believer's life is spent in conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil. Our blessed visions of glory, those sweet foretastes of heaven, those seasons spent on the holy mount with the Lord are to be seized and enjoyed when God gives them. But that is the exception, not the norm.

When we are in the valley, let us try always to remember that the Lord Jesus comes to his disciples in the valley, just as he does in the mountain. He always comes, manifesting himself to us at precisely the right time. The sorrows and conflicts of our valleys are as much by divine arrangement as the joys of our mountain tops.

### Utterly Dependent

We are also reminded by this story that we are utterly and entirely dependent upon our Lord Jesus Christ. Like Moses, when he came down from Mount Sinai, our Lord Jesus found his disciples in a state of complete confusion. They were under the assault of a malicious group of scribes (Mark 9:14-16). The occasion of this was the fact that the disciples had attempted to cast the demon out of this man's son without success. These are the same men who had, just a short time earlier, done many miracles and cast out many devils. Yet, before this man and his son, they were utterly helpless.

These disciples learned by humble experience a very needful lesson. It is a lesson we must learn, a lesson that must be burned into our hearts. You will find it in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ to his chosen disciples in John 15:5. — *"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."* Without him, without his grace, without his strength, without his wisdom, we can do nothing. — This is a lesson contrary and bitter to our flesh. However, it is a lesson demonstrated over and over again in Scripture. We must not forget it. If the Lord leaves us to ourselves, we have no strength to do anything or in any way resist the devil.

May God the Holy Spirit teach us daily that we are weak,

weakness itself, and utterly helpless without the wisdom, presence, power and grace of Christ, which he alone can give us.

## Satanic Power

This story is also recorded upon the pages of Holy Scripture to teach us and warn us of the horror of satanic power. Let none imagine that Satan is a fictional force of evil. Let none be so foolish as to laugh, and think that Satan is just a religious *boogie man* conjured up by crotchety old men to scare little children. If we read the gospel narratives together, we find that this father described the power and influence of Satan over his son in five ways.

1. He called this satanic spirit a foul spirit. Every foul, unclean thing proceeding out of the heart of man is promoted and encouraged by satanic influence. Those things that are contrary to nature, the moral perversities of homosexuality, are the result of God giving men and women over to the influence of hell (Romans 1:24-27).

2. The satanic spirit possessing the father's child was a destructive spirit, tearing the boy apart from within, causing him to foam at the mouth like a mad dog, gnash his teeth and pine away. It is satanic influence that causes people to run to destruction.

3. The spirit possessing this young man made him both deaf and dumb. The evil spirit from Satan kept the boy from hearing any who might help him and from crying out for help to any. So it is with poor, lost sinners. Satan blinds the eyes, stops the ears, and ties the tongues of men. He endeavors to keep sinners from seeing the glory of God in the face of Christ. He seeks to prevent any from hearing the gospel. And he tries to keep the needy soul from crying to the God of all grace for help. But, blessed be his name, the Friend of sinners is God's Mighty One, by whom the prince of darkness is cast out!

4. The satanic spirit possessing this man's son made the boy "a *lunatic*." John Gill described his condition as "a form of

epilepsy which causes fainting and dumbness, καρδιακος, a disorder of the heart.” He was, as Paul tells us, taken captive by Satan at his will (2 Timothy 2:26). What a sad picture! Yet, this is the picture of all sinners without Christ. Wicked men and women perform horrid atrocities in a seizure of wickedness, because sinners have no ability to resist the wicked one, until Christ comes to dwell within by the saving operations of his grace.

5. This demon took possession of this young man as a mere child. This is a matter of deepest importance. We must labor to do good to our children and to serve the interests of their souls, even from their earliest years. If Satan begins early to destroy them, we must begin early to save them. We must, to the best of our ability, control those who have influence over them, guide them in choosing their friends and companions, instruct them in the Scriptures and the blessed doctrine of the gospel, and pray for them.

## Dual Natures

We also see in this passage another of the numerous examples given in Scripture of the dual natures of every believer. This is brought out clearly by Mark (Mark 9:23-24).

“Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

Who can read those words and fail to see that faith and unbelief, righteousness and sin are found in the same person? The father of this child said, “*Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.*” He believed. Yet, he had some doubts. He brought his child with hope. Yet, he was fearful. He seems to have expressed this honestly in Mark 9:22. He said to the Lord Jesus, “*If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*”

You may think, “That’s not much faith.” You would be right in your thinking if you did. But it was enough. He took his son

home completely freed of the demon's power. He had faith as a grain of mustard seed; but it was true, God-given faith. The fact is: none of God's people in this world are perfect, not even in a single area. It is not our faith, neither its strength, nor its quality, nor its quantity that matters, but Christ, the Object of our faith. Luke 9:43-45 shows us this fact: Not only is true faith very often weak faith, true believers are often terribly ignorant of many very important things. Yes, all who are taught of God know the gospel. They all know all that they need to know to exercise true faith in Christ. All true believers know Christ. But it is a very dangerous thing for us to start trying to determine how much a person must know to be saved. It is not what we know that saves us, but WHO!

"And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying." (Luke 9:43-45)

## Christ's Dominion

We are taught here, by vivid example, the totality of Christ's dominion. There are many who foolishly imagine that Satan and the demons of hell are rivals to God, that they are somehow out of control. Nothing could be further from the truth. The devil is God's devil. He is under God's control. God uses him to accomplish his own purposes. And when he gets done with him, he will destroy him.

Do you see this? Our Lord Jesus Christ exercises total dominion over Satan and his agents at all times. He speaks with almighty, sovereign authority, and Satan and his demons immediately, implicitly, totally obey his voice. Satan is strong, malicious and busy. We are no match for the fiend of hell. But the Lord Jesus Christ is yet able to save to the uttermost all who

come unto God by him. He will save his elect from Satan's power. Satan can never snatch us from our Savior's almighty, omnipotent hands. Soon, the God of peace will bruise Satan under our heels (Romans 16:20).

## Believing Parents

I must not fail to call your attention to the fact that this story is recorded upon the pages of Inspiration to remind us again of the privileges and responsibilities of believing parents. We cannot save our children. We cannot change their nature. We cannot give them life and faith in Christ. Many believing men and women have raised houses full of rebels. Let none of us arrogantly and ignorantly imagine that because children are wicked something must be amiss with the parents. Such talk betrays pride and self-righteousness!

Still, there are some things we can and must do for our children. We can do for our sons and daughters what this man did for his son. He brought his son to the Savior, to the place where Christ was to be found; and we can bring our children to the house of God to hear the gospel. He brought the Savior to his Son by fervent prayer; and we can seek the Lord's mercy for our children. He acknowledged his son's condition to the Lord Jesus. This poor father acknowledged that his only child was possessed of the devil, deaf and dumb, a lunatic, wicked to the core, and dying. Then, he acknowledged that he had always been that way.

Mark shows us that his son's desperate need was his need. His prayer to the Savior was, "*Have compassion on us, and help us!*" And he believed God for his son. He could not believe instead of his son as a proxy. There is no such thing as proxy faith. But he did believe for his son. This man understood that foolishness is bound in the heart of every child. The rod of correction must be used to drive it from him; but only the grace of God can effectually deliver a sinner from the foolishness that

is in him and from the power of Satan that rules him.

## Operations of Grace

There is in this passage of Scripture an instructive, beautiful picture of God's mighty operations of grace. Whenever God saves a sinner, there are certain things you can expect to see, and certain things you can expect to happen. I do not suggest by any means that all who are saved have the same experiences; but every believer's experience is similar. Death is death. Life is life. Grace is grace. And salvation is salvation. This is how God performs it. This is how the Lord God performs his mighty operations of grace in us.

*First*, when God saves a sinner, there is a Divine call. — “*Bring thy son hither*” (v. 41). The Lord God of all grace orders providence to bring the chosen, redeemed sinner under the sound of the gospel and sends forth his Spirit to call his chosen to himself, by irresistible, effectual grace (Psalm 65:4; 110:3).

*Second*, whenever the Lord Jesus calls sinners to himself, as they are coming to him, there is usually a satanic throw (v. 42). Satan is now in a rage because he knows his time is short (Revelation 7:12). So he unleashes upon the sinner God is about to save, all his hellish power.

*Third*, when the Lord comes to give eternal life, there is a hopeful slaughter. God always brings us down, before he lifts us up. He always wounds, before he heals. He always strips, before he clothes. He always empties, before he fills. And God always kills, before he makes alive. (Mark 9:25-26).

“When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, *Thou dumb and deaf spirit*, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And *the spirit* cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.”

Then, blessed be his name, when the Lord Jesus comes in saving power, there is a resurrection from the dead (Ephesians

2:1-4). — “*But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose*” (Mark 9:27).

# Chapter 60

## Two Things We Must Avoid

Luke 9:46-50

“Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him, And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great. And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid *him* not: for he that is not against us is for us” (Luke 9:46-50).

Let us be sure we read this paragraph in its context. The Lord’s disciples were not able to cast out the demonic spirit possessing the young man brought to them (vv. 37-40). They ran across a man they did not know who was preaching the gospel, who cast out devils in the name of Christ, and told him to quit. Then, as they walked along, congratulating themselves on their great works, they started arguing about which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven!

In verses 46-50 our Lord Jesus Christ gives us two very important warnings. These are warnings needed in every age, warnings needed in every congregation, warnings needed by every believer. Here our Master tells us plainly that there are two things we must ever strive to avoid. We must strive to avoid these two terrible evils, because they are evils to which we are all prone and evils we seldom recognize in ourselves. We are very

quick to spot them in others, but very slow to see them in ourselves. May God the Holy Spirit graciously cause us to hear his Word to us in this brief paragraph. Here our Master warns us that we must ever guard against and seek to avoid the horrible evils of pride and censorship.

## Dispensational Premillennialism

*“Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest”* (v. 46). — As the Lord’s disciples were walking from Caesarea Philippi to Capernaum (Mark 9:33), they began to engage in an argument about which of them would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:1). I am only guessing, but the argument probably got pretty heated.

The dispute was not about degrees in glory, or in grace, or who should be the greatest apostle and preacher of the gospel. The dispute was bad enough, but not that bad. You see, these men still thought the Lord Jesus had come here to establish a carnal, earthly, Jewish empire, a literal rather than a spiritual kingdom, an earthly kingdom rather than a heavenly kingdom. Their argument was about who should be prime minister to the Messiah, to the Lord Jesus in his kingdom.

Prophecy is not and should not be a matter of great concern in the church of God. We rejoice to know that Christ is coming again (Revelation 1:7). When he comes, he will raise the dead, make all things new and sit in judgment over all his enemies (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Revelation 20:11-15). When the Lord Jesus comes again, our salvation will be complete. We are not in the least concerned about looking for signs and trying to figure out when the end shall be. It is absolutely evil to do so. Our business is serving and honoring our Redeemer until he comes.

Yet, the notion of dispensational, premillennialism is horribly evil. As it is with many today, it was the idea of the Jews, of the Pharisees in particular, and of these poor disciples that Christ, the Messiah, would establish a carnal, earthly, Jewish kingdom. And with that carnal doctrine, of necessity comes many carnal ideas,

such as those expressed here. Be sure you understand these things:

- Our Lord Jesus Christ is the King now, seated upon the throne of David, as David's Son in heaven (Acts 2:22-36).
- Our Lord's kingdom is his Church, the Israel of God, Abraham's spiritual seed, God's elect whom he redeemed with his own precious blood. – *“The kingdom of God is in you. – The kingdom of God is not in meat and in drink, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”*
- We are born into the kingdom of heaven by the new birth (John 3:5-7; Revelation 20:1-6). Faith in Christ is neither more nor less than bowing to the Son of God as your rightful Lord and King.

There is no such thing as a secret rapture, a seven year tribulation period, or a literal 1000 year millennial reign. It matters nothing to me what you believe or do not believe about prophetic systems, as long as you are not deluded by such baseless nonsense as that. The reason these things concern me is that they are not only without foundation in Scripture, they promote pride, divisiveness and carnal lusts after material things in the name of Christianity. Carnal religion promotes carnal hope; and carnal hope promotes carnal desires.

## Deity Manifest

*“And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him”* (v. 47). — Here is another of those almost casual declarations of our Savior's deity. He who is the omniscient God perceives the thoughts of men's hearts. None but God can perceive the thoughts of another's heart. And he who is God perceives the thoughts of all. Nothing is hidden from him. All things are naked and open to him with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4:13).

When our Master perceived the thoughts of the disciples'

hearts, when he would reprove them for their carnal strife, he picked up a child and set it beside himself in the presence of them all.

Matthew tells us that he sat this child in the midst of them all (Matthew 18:1). He wanted them all to see the child. Seeing this child, had he said nothing at all, they should have perceived his purpose. The Lord Jesus wanted them to see that he who is but a child, the most humble and least in his own eyes, is the greatest in the Church and Kingdom of God. Putting this child beside himself, pointing to him, perhaps putting his arm around his shoulders, the Lord Jesus said, — *“Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great”* (v. 48).

We must be careful not to make anything more of this than is intended, and not to make anything less of it than is intended. There is nothing taught or implied here about children, about the baptism of children, or the conversion of children. –Nothing! Certainly, there is nothing here to indicate that children are innocent and without sin before God until they reach an imaginary age of accountability!

## Christianity

The lesson is about Christianity. Our Lord is here teaching us that as a child is simple, humble, dependent, trusting and unconcerned about worldly fame, power and wealth, so we ought to walk before God. As a child, knowing its weakness, depends upon its father, so we ought, as men and women conscious of our weakness, to depend upon Christ (2 Corinthians 12:10). As a little child realizes that he is ignorant and helpless, and therefore depends upon others to teach him, guide him, hold his hand and protect him, so we ought to look to Christ for everything. As children are quickly pacified when injured by others, so we ought to be quick in forgiving those who injure and offend us. As children naturally embrace other children, so we ought to embrace others, avoiding and putting aside those things that

divide men and women from one another.

*“Whosoever shall receive this child,”* one like this child, not in age, but in meekness and humility, one that is not proud and haughty, ambitious of worldly honor and envious of others, whoever receives such a one into his house and heart (Specifically, he is talking about gospel preachers and the gospel we preach.) — *“In my name”* — because he belongs to me, because he is sent by me, because he represents me, because he delivers my message — *“Receiveth me”* — his Lord and Master, his Savior and King.

Let us receive one another as Christ himself, in his name. Receive your brother because he belongs to Christ, because is one of his, bears his image, is a partaker of his grace, is loved of God, chosen, redeemed, accepted and an heir of God, joint heir with Christ and with us, one with Christ and one with us in the family of God! Such is Christ’s great regard to his people that he takes anything done for one of his elect as if it had been done to him.

*“And whosoever shall receive me, receiveth him that sent me.”* — In exactly the same way as all who receive Christ receive the Father, so all who receive one of Christ’s disciples receive him. And all who mistreat one of his disciples mistreat him.

*“For he that is least among you all,”* in his own opinion, the one who truly considers himself the least, -- *“the same shall be great,”* highly honored, greatly used of God.

*“And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us”* (v. 49). — Again, be sure to read this statement in its context. John was not here suddenly seeking to change the subject. Just the opposite: The Master’s words pricked his heart. The Word of God brought to light the evil of something he and his brethren had recently done. Tender hearted John was immediately broken hearted because he knew what they had done was totally contrary to the spirit of Christ.

In essence, he was saying, — “Oh, how terribly proud and haughty we have been! Master, I have something to confess. We

saw a man the other day who was casting out devils in Your name, and we rebuked him, because he was not one of us.”

“*And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us*” (v. 50). — The Master plainly rebuked that censorious spirit. He said, “Do not ever take it upon yourself to rebuke, cut yourself off from, condemn, or even speak evil of any man (in public or in private) who is doing the same work you are doing, preaching the same gospel you are preaching, laboring in my name against the prince of darkness and for the souls of men, just because he is not one of your little group.”

## Pride

Pride is horribly evil and always divisive. We must ever guard against and strive to avoid that sinful, shameful pride that causes us to seek to promote, elevate, and exalt ourselves. Here is a little band of insignificant nobodies, publicans and fishermen, whom the Lord Jesus had chosen, sought out, called by his grace and made to be his disciples, — (Sinners forgiven! — Rebels conquered! — Prodigals recovered!), — arguing about who should be the greatest! Each one thought he was more deserving of high honor than any of the others!

Such is the depravity of our hearts still! There is no sin, no evil to which we are more naturally and wickedly inclined than pride. May God give us grace ever to realize this and ever be aware of this monster in our hearts that we may watch and pray. No sin is more deeply rooted in our depraved hearts. It clings to us like glue. It is as much a part of us as darkness is a part of night. It never dies, until these bodies cease to breathe. It does not even weaken.

There is no evil of our hearts so hypocritical and deceitful as pride. It wears the robe of humility. It pretends to be meek. It wants desperately to appear self-abasing. Pride is found in the ignorant and the brilliant, the poor and the rich, the most useless and the most gifted.

Yet, there is absolutely nothing about us, any of us that

should make, or even allow us to be proud. What can be more absurd than a proud man? Of all creatures, we who are the sons and daughters of Adam have the least reason to be proud. Of all men, we who are made to be the objects and recipients of God's free grace in Christ have the least excuse for pride. Of all believers, sinners called and gifted of God to preach the gospel of Christ have the least reason to be proud! Nothing in this world is more contrary to the grace of God than our pride (1 Corinthians 4:7; Ephesians 3:8).

Nothing in the world is more contrary to the example our Lord Jesus left for us to follow than pride. Nothing is more contrary to our Savior's character than our pride (John 13:1-5, 12-15; Philippians 2:1-8; 3:10).

## Censorship

We must also constantly guard ourselves against and avoid our arrogant, proud tendency to censorship of our brethren. We should studiously avoid sitting in judgment over, criticizing, condemning, or in any way seeking to undermine the ministries of others who serve Christ, but are not aligned with us. That is precisely the meaning of our Lord's words in verse 50. — *“And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.”*

One of the most shameful, God dishonoring, gospel crippling deeds of Church history is the fact that throughout the history of God's Church there have been many who equate serving Christ and defending the faith with dividing brethren. And this evil has never been more pervasive than it is today.

Be sure you understand my meaning. Our Lord is not here telling us that we are to be indifferent to sound doctrine, or that we are to compromise the gospel for the sake of getting along with others. Heresy is to be and must be exposed, identified and condemned. But there are many who serve the cause of Christ, who preach the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ, who are not a part of our “little group,” our denomination, or our small circle of fellowship.

Let others, if they must, speak ill of us, separate themselves from us, censure us, and condemn us. We must not engage in such evil. For Christ's sake, for the gospel's sake, let us do what we can to promote unity in God's Kingdom, among God's people, and promote those who preach the gospel of God's free grace in Christ. As in the days of Elijah, God still has his seven thousand (though, perhaps, unknown to us), who have not bowed the knee to Baal. We are all too prone to think like those of whom Job spoke, "*We are the men, and wisdom shall die with us*" (Job 12:2). If others choose not to identify themselves with Don Fortner and think and speak evil of Don Fortner, that is no big deal. If they preach the gospel of Christ, if God is using them, I rejoice and thank God for them (Numbers 11:27-29; Philippians 1:12-18).

May God give us grace to cease from strife and contention. May God the Holy Spirit teach us to rejoice in the labors, usefulness and success of others who serve his cause by the gospel, pulling down the strong holds of Satan and building the kingdom of our God. – "*Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.*" Let us give our time, efforts, and energies to the preaching of the gospel, aiming at the glory of God and the salvation of sinners on the brink of everlasting ruin. Let us preach Christ, not controversy, seek God's glory, not personal greatness, seek to build up, not to tear down, hold up the cross, not a creed and seek the good of men's souls, not the smile of their approval. Like John the Baptist, let us point needy sinners to Christ, the Lamb of God, and say, "Follow him," not us. Christ is not divided. Let us not be (Romans 14:4; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 3:9-10, 16-17; 10:15-17; Colossians 3:12-15).

# Chapter 61

## “When the Time was Come”

### Luke 9:51-56

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save *them*. And they went to another village” (Luke 9:51-56).

From old eternity the Son of God determined to save his people by the sacrifice of himself; and nothing could keep him from the accomplishment of his determined purpose. Having pledged himself as our Surety in the covenant of grace, he never went back on his word, or even thought about doing so (Proverbs 8:23-32). Though we fell in the garden, through the sin and fall of our father Adam, our Lord’s purpose never changed. At last the appointed time came; and the Son of God assumed our nature that he might die in our stead upon the cursed tree (Romans 5:6-8; Galatians 4:4-6). He had a baptism to be baptized with. He had a cup to drink. With ardent desire, he longed to eat the last passover supper with his disciples. Now, his hour had come. Now, in due time, when the fulness of time was come, Luke tells us — “*It came to pass, when the time was come that he should be*

*received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem”*

He had set his face like a flint upon the accomplishment of the great work he had undertaken for us and refused to be hindered. With the Son of God, there was no turning back. Though there were none to help and many who tried to hinder him, he would not be deterred from his great work.

## A Ready Substitute

Because of his great love for us, the Son of God went to Calvary to die as our Substitute willingly (v. 51). Our great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world resolutely determined to fulfill his covenant engagements as our Surety. Never once did he flinch. When his hour came, *“he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”*

There was a time fixed in the purpose of God from eternity for the sufferings and death of our Redeemer. He knew the hour appointed. He knew his time was at hand. He never paused, never hesitated, never flinched from his purpose. He never thought about hiding from his enemies or saving himself. He had come to save others. Himself he could not and would not save.

When he saw the hour approaching, he looked through his death and sufferings and looked beyond them, to the glory that should follow. The Lord Jesus knew what his reward would be. He knew that soon he would be *received up into glory* (1 Timothy 3:16), received up into the highest heavens, to be enthroned as Zion’s King. Moses and Elias spoke of his death as his departure out of this world, as the decease he would accomplish at Jerusalem. The Master himself looked upon it as a thing to be desired. Why? — By his death, he would save his people. — By his death, he would glorify his Father. — And by his death, he would be translated into a better world, a better life, in better company.

May God give us grace to look upon death as a desirable thing, not a thing to be dreaded and feared. If we are Christ’s, death should be looked upon as a welcome friend. Soon we shall

be “*received up*,” to be with Christ where he is (John 14:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Philipians 1:21-23).

Knowing that the hour had come, anticipating the joy set before him, the Lord Jesus *steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem* the place where he was to suffer and die. He was fully determined to go, and would not be dissuaded. He went directly to Jerusalem, because there his business lay. There he must lay down his life for his sheep. Courageously and cheerfully, he went to Jerusalem to die for us.

Yes, he knew all that would befall him there. But he had a mission to accomplish. He did not fail; neither was he discouraged; but set his face as a flint, knowing that he should be not only justified, but glorified too by the redemption he would accomplish there as our Substitute (Isaiah 50:7).

How should this shame us for, and shame us out of, our reluctance and backwardness to do anything for him, suffer anything for his sake, or bear any reproach for him! How can we draw back and turn from him and his service who steadfastly set his face against all opposition, to go through and finish the great work of obtaining eternal redemption for us by the sacrifice of himself at Jerusalem?

Let us ever give thanks to God our Savior for his willingness to suffer for us and save us!

The Lord Jesus knew full well all that awaited him at Jerusalem. — The Betrayal! — The Mock Trial! — The Mockery! — The Crown of Thorns! — The Spit! — The Spear! — The Agony! — Yet, he never flinched! His heart, set upon us from eternity, drove him as it were, to the torment of divine wrath and judgment. His love for us caused him to hasten to his torment, that he might redeem us from the wrath of God. It was the desire of his soul to die in our place at Jerusalem!

“Amazing love! How can it be?  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!”

In the light of these things, who could ever question the willingness of God to save sinners? Jesus Christ is an able, ready, willing Savior! He who was ready to suffer at Jerusalem is ready

to save today! Nowhere is it written that he is unwilling. Everywhere it is written that he is willing to save!

May God give us grace to follow our Lord's example. Like my Master, I pray that God will give me grace to spend my life for him who spent his life for me. Let me be ready and willing to go anywhere for Christ, do anything for Christ, endure anything for Christ. When his will is known, my duty is clear. Let my face be set steadfastly, for the glory of God.

## The Samaritans' Great Loss

There was a village of Samaritans who allowed racial prejudice to rob them of eternal blessedness (vv. 52-53). If you want to see the origins of the racial strife between the Samaritans and the Jews, you can read about it in 2 Kings 17 and Ezra 4. But whatever the origin, racial prejudice is a horrible evil and often is the cause of even greater evil. These unnamed Samaritans would not receive the Lord Jesus because he was evidently determined to go to Jerusalem, and the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans.

What a sad picture this is of man's obstinate unbelief! The Lord Jesus sends his messengers. By the gospel we preach, we make ready for him, preparing the way of the Lord. Yet, multitudes, the vast majority, like these Samaritans, find a reason not to receive him.

## Angry Apostles

James and John were enraged by the behavior of these Samaritans who so ill-treated the Master. — "*And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?*" (v. 54) They were in a tizzy! They said, "Lord, give us leave to do so and we will command fire to come down from heaven and burn them to ashes. We will make them like Sodom!"

Much could and should be said about this. James and John were zealous, but wrong. They used the Scripture, but did so rashly. They cited the prophets, but cited them in a manner never intended. Let me just say this: Zeal without knowledge is a dangerous thing. It is an army without a general, a ship without a rudder. Multitudes have done great harm in the kingdom of God, with true zeal for the honor of Christ, but zeal that refused direction. — Be warned!

The Lord Jesus sternly rebuked James and John for their suggestion and thereby sternly rebukes the spirit of persecution. — "*But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*" (v. 55). The reproof he gave to James and John for their fiery, furious zeal is highly instructive. Human religion often seeks to establish itself by the sword or by legislation. The church and kingdom of God has other weapon (2 Corinthians 10:4). The only weapons God's church ever uses or seeks to use, the only weapons by which God is honored, in opposing evil and in overthrowing false religion is prayer and preaching. Godliness cannot be legislated, faith cannot be forced and righteousness cannot be established by the laws of men, by political might, or by the sword of war.

## Our Master's Mission

*"For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village"* (v. 56). — The Lord Jesus came to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21; John 3:16-17; 1 Timothy 1:15). Everything revealed in Holy Scripture about the Lord Jesus Christ proclaims with loud voice, — "Jesus saves! Jesus saves!" His sovereign purpose in predestination is his purpose of grace. His covenant is the covenant of grace. His incarnation is the incarnation of God in human flesh, God come to save! His miracles of mercy were but pictures of mercy flowing from his heart to needy souls. His doctrine is the doctrine of grace. Grace was poured into his lips from eternity as the sinner's Surety; and grace pours from his lips to everlasting!

“We have heard the joyful sound:  
‘Jesus saves! Jesus saves!’  
Spread the tiding all around, —  
‘Jesus saves! Jesus saves!’”

He says to needy sinners, "*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*" He calls poor, lost, helpless, ruined, doomed, damned sinners to himself with the promise of mercy, grace, salvation and eternal life to all who come to him!

# Chapter 62

## A Fake Disciple and Two Misguided Preachers

Luke 9:57-62

“And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain *man* said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:57-62).

The first two of these men are mentioned by Matthew as well (Matthew 8:19-21). The third is mentioned by Luke alone. The fact that Luke was inspired to give us these three men and our Lord’s conversations with them in this particular place, and the fact that the three are lumped together is not accidental. The Holy Spirit has given us these three, brief conversations; and he has given them to us in this particular context for specific reasons, to teach us specific lessons.

If we would understand the lessons taught in this short paragraph, we must not fail to see the context in which it is given and keep it in mind. The Lord Jesus had just finished instructing

his disciples about serving him (Luke 9:43-50, 55). Then we are told that he set his face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem to die as our Substitute (Luke 9:51). The Lord Jesus had just announced his mission in this world, saying, — “*The Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them*” (Luke 9:56). And he was about to send out seventy of his disciples to preach the gospel (Luke 10:1). But just before he sends out the seventy to proclaim the gospel of his grace, Luke tells us about the Master’s conversation with these three men. His purpose in doing so is obvious: — If we would follow Christ, if we would serve him, we must do so wholeheartedly, with singleness of mind and clarity of purpose.

## A Fake Disciple

Here is a man who volunteers to become one of Christ’s disciples (vv. 57-58). Matthew gives us just a little bit more information about him than Luke. Matthew tells us that this man was a scribe (Matthew 8:19-20).

He was a very religious man, a scribe, a man who spent his life in the Scriptures; but he was a lost man. Judging purely from the Lord’s reply to his bold, confident declaration, this man had the idea in his head that it would be to his advantage to be numbered among the Lord’s disciples. He seems to have thought to himself, “If this man is the Christ, if he is going to Jerusalem to establish his kingdom, I don’t want to be left out and miss the great opportunity of being a part of his royal court.”

He made a big, presumptuous promise. — “*And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way,*” going up to Jerusalem, where it was commonly thought the Messiah would first appear in his glory, “*a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.*”

At first glance, this would seem to be a very good thing. After all, this is what all believers must do. All who are Christ’s are people who follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Revelation 14:4). They willingly follow him. Whether through rain or fire, whether into prison or into death, they follow him. They are resolutely

determined to do so.

The poor man, blinded by his religion, as well as by his own depraved heart, had no idea what is involved in following Christ. He did not ask. He did not care. He was not concerned about what it means to be a follower of Christ. He was only concerned about what he could gain by following him. Besides, he was quite confident that he was up to the task, whatever it might be.

Frequently, we meet with men and women just like this scribe. They are very quick to declare, "I will." They will make their declaration publicly and confidently, just like this scribe. — "I will follow Christ, no matter what." But like this scribe, they speak rashly, without consideration, and speak amiss. They stand up and say, "I now give my heart to the Lord."

How often we hear preachers urging people to give their hearts to Christ. Indeed, we must give our hearts to him; but salvation does not come by us giving our hearts to him. Salvation comes by him giving grace to us, by which we are constrained to give our hearts to him. Salvation comes by Christ giving you something, not by you giving him something.

This poor scribe, like all men are naturally, was a will worshipper. He thought salvation could be his by the mere exercise of his will. He thought his decision to follow Jesus would make him part of the Kingdom of God. He thought his decision would open the door of heaven. He made a big promise. He was very confident that he could keep his promise. But he was totally ignorant of the things of God. Like Nicodemus, he could neither see, nor enter into the Kingdom of God, because he had not been born again.

The fact that this man was a fake disciple is obvious, because those things that are both essential to and vital parts of faith in Christ were missing.

It is a fact, plainly revealed in Scripture, that no one can come to Christ until Christ first comes to him (John 6:44). This man came to the Lord physically, but not spiritually. He came in word, but not in heart. He came outwardly, but not inwardly. I will make no attempt to say whether he was sincere or purely

hypocritical. The fact is, he could not come and did not come to Christ in saving faith. He had no divine call. He was not taught of God. There is no indication that he had experienced any conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment. He made no confession of sin, no cry for mercy, no plea for grace, and expressed no need of Christ.

This scribe simply decided he would join the “Jesus’ club,” become a “promise keeper,” and get in on a good thing. He did not need grace. He was very confident he could follow Christ anywhere, through anything. After all, he had made his decision! But his decision could not change his heart (Romans 9:16).

Look at our Lord’s answer to this scribe and learn the lesson taught in it. The path of faith in Christ is the costly, painful path of self-denial. — *“And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head”* (v. 58).

Foxes have holes in which to bear their young, and birds have nests in which to lay and hatch their eggs; but the Lord Jesus had not even a place in which to lay his head. Though he is Lord of all, in order to save us, the Lord Jesus Christ sacrificed his very life, laid down everything (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:5-8). If we would follow him, we must count the cost; and, counting the cost, we must willingly lay down our lives, lose our lives to him (Luke 14:25-33).

## Misguided Loyalty

*“And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God”* (vv. 59-60). — Here is a preacher with misguided loyalty. If we only had Luke’s account, we could not be certain about the fact that this man was already one of the Lord’s disciples; but Matthew tells us plainly that this man was already a disciple (Matthew 8:21).

The man had been called. He was one of those like Matthew, Peter, James and John to whom the Lord Jesus had come, to whom he had said, "*Follow Me.*" Being called, he was a believer. He was a true disciple. He was, in fact, one of those whom the Lord Jesus was about to send out as a gospel preacher. It seems that he was willing to go, and wanted to go; but he desired deferment for a while, because he had another, more pressing, more important responsibility. Before he could go out preaching, he must first take care of his family's needs. He said, "*Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*"

Perhaps he was, as many think, saying, "Lord, let me first take care of my aging father until he dies. Then I will go." Perhaps, as our version suggests, he was saying, "Lord, my father has just died. Let me go home and bury him, and I will go." Either way, his request seems very honorable. After all, a man is responsible to honor his parents. Funerals are important. It is always proper to show respect for others. It is always proper to take care of personal responsibilities.

Why, then, did the Lord Jesus respond to this man's request the way he did? — "*Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.*"

The Lord was simply saying this: — There are others who can and will take care of that matter. You have more important things to do. There are other people to bury your father. I have called you and sent you to preach the gospel.

Many good men, men who know, believe, and preach the gospel spend far too much time and energy burying the dead instead of preaching the gospel. Without question, there are lots of dead people who need burying; but there are plenty of dead people to bury them. Those who have been called of God to preach the gospel must never be turned aside from their calling. Family, friends and neighbors may not (almost certainly will not) understand such devotion to Christ and his cause. But those who are called and sent of God to preach the gospel must not allow concern for the welfare of their families to interfere with obedience to God. If I am God's servant, serving the interests of his Kingdom and his glory, he will take care of those things that

concern me concerning my family and its welfare.

No man can serve God on his terms. Sadly, there are many who attempt to do so, and pretend to do so; but the fact remains: — No man can serve God on his terms! There are many who attempt to serve Christ with divided loyalties, like the man in our text, attempting to be part time preachers, attempting to both follow Christ and pursue the cares of the world. They are willing to be preachers. They are willing to serve Christ. But they put off their service to Christ, dividing their time and energy between Christ and other matters of concern and responsibility. They fail to understand, or refuse to obey the Scriptures. Those who are called of God to preach the gospel must give themselves entirely to the work of the gospel ministry: to prayer, to study and to preaching (1 Timothy 4:12-16).

If the Lord God has called me to preach the gospel, if Christ has sent me to serve his Kingdom, he will take care of my affairs. He is honor bound to do so (Exodus 34:23-24; Luke 22:35). Matthew Henry wrote, “The way of duty is the way of safety. If we serve God, he will preserve us; and those that venture for him shall never lose by him. While we are employed in God’s work, and are attending upon him, we are taken under special protection, as noblemen and members of parliament are privileged from arrests.” If I feed God’s family, he will feed mine. If I serve his house, he will serve mine. If I protect his children, he will protect mine. If I provide for his, he will provide for mine (2 Timothy 2:4).

## Looking Back

*“And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (vv. 61-62). — Here is a preacher who put his hand to the plow and looked back.

This man’s conduct stands here as a warning to all to whom God has given the privilege of preaching the gospel. Because of the context in which this is found, I am confident this man, like

the one before him and those following in chapter 10, was a man sent out by the Lord Jesus to preach the gospel. The lesson taught in these two verses is to be applied in its strictest sense to all who are sent of God to this blessed work. The lesson is clear: — We cannot serve Christ with divided hearts!

This man appears to have had a divided heart. He wanted both the ease and joy of other men and the nobility of preaching the gospel. He seems to have looked upon the work of the ministry as a sacrifice rather than a privilege. He seems to have been willing to expose himself to the strongest temptation possible to turn him aside from the work to which he had been called.

This man's conduct stands as a warning to all who follow Christ. We cannot serve Christ with divided hearts! Those who look back to the world, like Lot's wife looked back to Sodom, betray something in themselves that wants to go back! Be warned. Christ will not share his throne with anyone, not even with our dearest relatives. He requires our hearts. He must be first. Abraham had to leave his father and his father's house, for Christ's sake. When he tried to both follow Christ and stay with his father, God killed his father. Moses had to forsake the woman who raised him as her own son, for Christ's sake. God forced him to choose between pleasing his wife, or obeying him (Exodus 4:24-26; Proverbs 4:20-23; 23:17-18, 23, 26). — We cannot serve Christ with divided hearts!

# Chapter 63

## “Whither He Himself would Come”

### Luke 10:1-7

“After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly *is* great, but the labourers *are* few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace *be* to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house” (Luke 10:1-7).

“*After these things*” — After the Lord Jesus had told his disciples plainly that he must go to Jerusalem and be delivered into the hands of wicked men (9:44), — After he had steadfastly set his face to go up to Jerusalem to die as our Substitute (9:51), — After the Master corrected some of the errors of his disciples and showed them what was required of those who follow him (9:43-62), — After exposing their pride and ambition and teaching them the necessity of childlike humility (9:47-48), — After correcting their censorious spirit (9:49-50), — After he rebuked them for wanting to call down fire from heaven upon the

Samaritans (9:52-55), — After the Lord Jesus again declared his mission as the Son of man (9:56), — After the Master had demonstrated the necessity of whole hearted consecration and devotion to him (9:57-62), — “*After these things*” the Lord Jesus sent out seventy men in pairs of two to preach the gospel.

Luke here records for our learning an incident that is not mentioned by the other gospel writers. He here describes our Lord’s commission of the seventy to go before his face preaching the gospel in every city and place to which he himself would come. We do not know who these men were. Their names are nowhere given. The subsequent history of their labors is not revealed. But the instructions set before us in these seven verses of Inspiration are very instructive and set before us lessons that demand our careful attention.

### **God's Servants**

The things revealed in these verses are matters which primarily concern gospel preachers. Some of the statements in this passage cannot be strictly applied to any except these seventy men. However, it is a serious mistake to think that because these things were spoken to these men specifically, or because they are specifically instructions for preachers, they therefore have no meaningful relevance to other believers. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Pastors, elders, missionaries and teachers of the gospel ought in all things to be exemplary standards for all believers to follow. But faithful gospel preachers are, first and foremost, believers, sinners saved by the grace of God, just like all God’s saints. Gospel preachers, like you, are Christ’s disciples, people who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and, like other believers, the servants of God. What our Lord here tells us is required of all who preach the gospel, he also requires of all who follow him.

Are you a believer? Are you one of Christ’s disciples? Are you redeemed by his blood, forgiven, justified, accepted in the Beloved? Are you born of God, an heir of eternal life, a possessor

of God's great salvation? If you are, the instructions here given are instructions for you. The lessons of this passage are lessons for you and me to learn, lay to heart, and follow all the days of our lives. May God the Holy Spirit teach us the lessons here revealed and give us grace to govern our lives by them for the glory of God.

## Divinely Appointed

*“After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come”* (v. 1). — These seventy men were appointed by the Lord Jesus himself to preach the gospel. The word translated *“appointed”* is a word that is used in only one other place in the New Testament (Acts 1:24). It means to *“show”* or *“demonstrate.”* It has the idea of marking out distinctly, appointing to an office or work, by an obvious sign. A very similar derivative of the word is found back in Luke 1:80, where Luke describes the showing of John the Baptist to Israel. As John the Baptist was distinctly and manifestly appointed as God's prophet, so every God called, gospel preacher is made manifest as a man called of God by the gifts God gives him to preach the gospel.

These men appointed by Christ to preach the gospel were sent by him in pairs, two by two. They were sent in pairs because two are better than one. If the one falls, the other will pick him up. The lesson here should be obvious. — Believers need one another. We cannot serve Christ alone. And preachers need the aide, encouragement and strength of other faithful men.

Our Lord did not merely send these men out like we might send a child outside to play. The words *“sent forth”* in verse two are very forceful. They mean *“to send forth with force.”*

Why does Luke use that particular expression? He did so because, though every proud heart loves attention and wants to be in the spotlight (Lots of men want to stand in the pulpit and preach and wear the title of a pastor or a preacher!), nothing will ever cause a man to give himself to the work of the gospel,

nothing will ever cause a man to go forth as a laborer in God's vineyard, except the constraint of God's omnipotent grace and irresistible call. Bible colleges, seminaries and personal ambition put multitudes of men in pulpits. But only God can make a preacher. Only God can send forth laborers into his vineyard. Many run who are not sent; but they run in vain. Those who are sent forth by God never run in vain or never labor in vain (Isaiah 55:11; 1 Corinthians 15:58).

## Before His Face

Those men sent forth by Christ into his vineyard are sent forth "*before his face!*" I cannot imagine a more awesome, more sobering, more weighty thought. We labor not before the faces of men, but before the face of God! All that we do, we do before his face!

Be sure you do not miss the last line of verse one. -- "*After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.*" — Forceful as our English translation is, the original language is even more forceful. Luke is quite literally saying that our Lord sent these men into every city and place into which he himself was about to come.

Wherever the Son of God sends a gospel preacher, he himself comes! This is how the Lord God comes to men and women by his Spirit. He comes in by and through the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:14-17; Titus 1:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; 1 Peter 1:23-25; Hebrews 4:12-13). Look at Luke 10:16 and get some idea of the seriousness with which the gospel is to be heard. If the Lord Jesus is pleased to speak to you by the gospel, you dare not receive the grace of God in vain. — "*He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.*"

## Men of Prayer

*“Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest”* (v. 2). — If we would serve Christ, honor God and serve the souls of men while we live in this world, we must be men of prayer (v. 2). This is the leading thought with which our Lord sends these men out to preach the gospel. Before he tells them what is required of them, before he tells them of the dangers they must face, before he bids them go, he says, *“pray!”* Prayer is the most powerful weapon we have in this world, with which and by which to serve our God (James 5:16). Prayer is the one thing in which all believers can engage. Children of God, pray for one another. Pray for God’s servants. Pray for the success of the gospel. Pray that the Lord of the harvest would send forth laborers into his vineyard.

## Men in Peril

*“Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves”* (v. 3). — If we would follow Christ, serve his cause and proclaim the gospel of his grace, we must be prepared, as we go through this world, to live as men in peril (v. 3). Like those earliest disciples, we live in perilous times. If we would follow Christ, if we would serve the souls of men, if we would live for the glory of God, if we would serve the interests of his kingdom, if we would make known to men the gospel of the grace of God, we must not expect to be treated any different than our Lord and his disciples were treated (1 Peter 3:18; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 John 3:13).

The plain fact is, the offense of the cross has not ceased, and will not cease while the world stands (Galatians 5:11). As Cain hated Abel because of Abel’s faith in Christ, so the children of Cain will hate and persecute the sons of Abel until the end of the world. As Martin Luther put it, “Cain will murder Abel, if he can, to the very end of the world.”

## Men of Purpose

“Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again” (vv. 4-6)

If we would serve our God and the souls of eternity bound men and women, we must be men of purpose. Like David, we must know the cause we serve is God’s cause, the cause of his Kingdom and the cause of his glory; and serve it with determination.

Those who preach the gospel are not to provide for themselves. Money and material matters must not be matters of concern to us (Nehemiah 6:3). God’s servants are to provide nothing for themselves. Those who preach the gospel are to live by the gospel, by the generosity of God’s people.

And God’s servants must not court men. If we would follow Christ, we must be thoroughly devoted to him. Gospel preachers, in particular, must behave as men who have no time to waste on trivial matters. Let all who serve God give honor to whom honor is due. Let us ever be thoughtful, kind and courteous. But God’s servants must not court men. Though we live by the free generosity of faithful men and women, we must never court the favor of any.

God’s servants are to be messengers of peace. Our message is the gospel of peace. We are servants of the Prince of Peace. We show men and women the path of peace. We guide people with the counsel of peace. We promote peace. And wherever Christ, the Son of Peace is, God’s people and God’s servants are received.

## Men of Plainness

If we would live in this world for the glory of God and lead others to do so, we must be men of plainness. — *“And in the*

*same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house” (v. 7).*

We must strive to live as, indeed, we must strive to be men and women whose first thoughts are about Christ, his glory, heaven, eternity, our own souls and the souls of others. These are matters of first, primary importance.

This admonition is especially applicable to all who seek to set before men and women the weighty matters of eternity. If ever a preacher becomes thought of as a man who seeks wealth, luxury and earthly pleasure, his usefulness as a preacher is at an end. It does not matter how vehemently I urge eternity bound men and women to seek the unseen world of eternity (Colossians 3:1-7; 2 Corinthians 4:15-18), if by my actions I lead them to seek those things that are seen.

The Master commands his servants to be content with the place where he sends them and with the provision he gives them, eating what is set before them. Assuring us that the laborer is worthy of his hire, he tells his servants never to go from house to house begging. The King of Glory provides well for his own. Begging, groveling, discontent preachers are a reproach to themselves, a reproach to the gospel, a reproach to God’s people and a reproach to the King!

# Chapter 64

## “Be Sure of This”

### Luke 10:8-16

“And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me” (Luke 10:8-16).

Luke alone was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to record the event describe in the first part of this chapter. He tells us of the Lord Jesus sending out seventy unnamed men into the cities into which he was about to come. These men were sent with the message of his grace, sent to preach the gospel, because he was about to come to these places himself (v. 1).

You can mark this down: — Whenever and wherever, to whomsoever the Lord Jesus Christ is about to come in saving power, mercy and grace, he will send a man to that place and to that person preaching the gospel. This is God’s chosen, ordained method of grace; and he does not depart from it.

“Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly *is* great, but the labourers *are* few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace *be* to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.” (vv. 2-7)

Let’s pick up the narrative at verse 8. These nine verses (vv. 8-16) contain lessons we need to lay to heart and remember, as we seek to serve Christ and the souls of men in this world.

## Simplicity

The first thing to be learned from these verses is a lesson commonly ignored, despised, and neglected in the religious world. We have before us in verses 8-11 a very clear display of the simplicity of the gospel.

How I wish men understood this, especially those men who are preachers! — The gospel of God’s free, sovereign, saving grace in Christ is the most profound thing in the universe. It is a mystery of such depth and wisdom that the angels of God desire to look into it. It is such a wonder that we shall spend eternity learning its wonders (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). The gospel is a mystery of infinite proportions; but the preaching of the gospel and the faith of the gospel, believing Christ is a matter of utter simplicity (2 Corinthians 11:2-4).

When our Master sent out these seventy men, he gave them a very plain, simple, singular task. They were sent out to serve the souls of men, not to be served by men. — “*And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. And heal the sick that are therein*” (vv. 8-9). He taught his servants to live modestly, be easily satisfied, and to heal the sick. It is the responsibility of all who are sent of God to preach the gospel to heed these instructions. Preachers who seek wealth and luxury are repugnant. God’s servants live upon the generosity of God’s people, and rightfully so; but God’s servants refuse to enrich themselves, even when given the opportunity to do so. Gospel preachers serve the souls of men. They do not seek to be served by men. Faithful men seek to heal the needs of those they serve. They do not seek to be “well healed” by men.

Next, the Master says, “*And say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.*” — These men were sent out to proclaim a very plain, singular, vital message to eternity bound sinners. — “*The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.*” They were required to preach with great simplicity and plainness of speech, to preach with boldness and confidence, urgently pressing upon their hearers the claims of Christ, the sovereign Lord. Gospel preaching is always confrontational. It always demands the surrender of rebels to Christ the Lord (Luke 14:26-33).

Rolfe Barnard used to say, “Preach for a verdict.” He meant by that that preaching should always press those who hear us to do something (Come to Christ. Repent. Devote oneself more completely to the Savior, etc). As my old Homiletics’/Pastoral Theology professor used to tell us at the opening of almost every class, “Where there is no summons, there is no sermon.” Preaching is not feeding people religious, doctrinal facts, but setting before needy souls the riches and glory of Christ, demanding faith in and surrender to him What is preaching? It is expounding the Scriptures, testifying of our experience of grace in the kingdom of God and persuading sinners to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:23).

Would to God preachers would quit trying to reason men and women into faith. Sinners cannot be reasoned into faith. They can be reasoned into religion, but not into Christ. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. If we would do good for the souls of men, we must preach the gospel of Christ with simplicity and boldness.

We must not be discouraged, or turned aside from our great work because some refuse to believe. See what the Lord's instructions are in this regard in verses 10-11. — *“But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say,” Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”* (Read Romans 3:3-4.) The first lesson is this: — The preaching of the gospel is a matter of singularity (We have but one message — The Gospel of the Kingdom of God.). The message is to be preached with deliberate simplicity. And it is to be preached with sincerity, earnestly seeking the salvation of God's elect.

## Sovereignty

Second, in verses 12-15 our Lord Jesus gives us a tremendous display of divine sovereignty.

*“But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.”*

Here our Savior shows us that the Lord God almighty, in his wisdom and sovereignty, hides the gospel from some and reveals it to others, as he will. In other words, he has mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will he hardens. I know this is the

meaning of our Lord's words here because he tells us so in a similar passage in Matthew 11:20-27.

“Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*.”

Does this mean that man has no responsibility for his own soul? Certainly not! Read Matthew 11:28-30.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.”

## Responsibility

The third lessons taught in these verses is this: — If you go to hell, it will be altogether your own fault, your own doing. Many foolishly imagine that any talk of man's responsibility implies some ability in depraved, spiritually dead sinners; but that is not

the case. It is the responsibility of all who hear the gospel to believe the gospel. If that declaration does not fit your theological system, you should scrap your system, not the Word of God (Proverbs 1:23-33; John 3:18; 16:9; 1 John 5:10).

The wages of sin is death. There is not a soul in hell that raises his proud head and declares to the Almighty, "I am damned because I wanted to trust you, I wanted to believe on Christ, but you would not give me grace, you would not give me faith, you would not save me." Rather, the damned are everlastingly tormented by the fact that they are justly damned because of their willful unbelief.

Without question, the most abominable evil in this world is unbelief. Unbelief declares that God himself is a liar (1 John 5:10). That means that if you go to hell, you will have no one to blame but yourself! You are responsible for, and you shall be held accountable for every gospel sermon you ever heard, or could have heard, for every ray of light you have despised, and for every witness of truth you have spurned.

### **God's Ambassadors**

Here is a fourth lesson. It is found in verse 16. — Faithful gospel preachers are God's ambassadors to your soul. The Lord Jesus declares, "*He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.*" That is exactly what the Apostle Paul asserts in 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:1. Faithful gospel preachers, men sent of God to declare his gospel are God's ambassadors, God's representatives, by whom God speaks to your soul. They are to be heard, received and treated as God's ambassadors (Isaiah 52:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7, 17).

# Chapter 65

## Joy Checked and Joy Encouraged

### Luke 10:17-20

“And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:17-20).

The Lord our God would ever have us rejoice in him and in his goodness. Indeed, true believers are described as a people who “*rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*” We are commanded to “*rejoice in the Lord always.*” This joy, true, spiritual joy, “*joy in believing,*” is joy that is in the Lord and arises from the knowledge of his grace. We should always rejoice; but that admonition is tempered with “*in the Lord.*”

Luke 10:17-20 gives us an example of our Savior teaching his disciples to rejoice in him, his grace, and his providence; but not in other things. The Lord Jesus had sent seventy of his disciples out preaching the gospel. Here they have returned with exuberant joy. I want us to learn four things from these verses. May God the Holy Spirit inscribe these four important lessons upon our hearts. They will serve us well as we seek to serve our Master in this world.

## Pride

*First*, we are all too easily puffed up with pride. We must not blame these disciples too severely for their excitement and joy. Who would not be elated by such experiences? Yet, the report these men made, and the Master's response to it seems to suggest that their joy on this occasion needed to be tempered with more grace than they displayed. There was apparently much false fire mingled with their joy. There was too much of self in it.

“And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (vv. 17-18).

Young soldiers, with their first taste of victory, are often lifted up with far too much self-confidence and self-congratulation. The Lord Jesus seems to have read this evil in their hearts. Therefore, he seems to say to them, “Calm down a little. What you have seen and experienced is not your doing, but mine. – *“I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven”* long before you were born. (Revelation 12:3-4; Isaiah 14:12-17). He foresaw and promised Satan's fall through the preaching of the gospel (Matthew 16:18). He had come specifically to topple Satan's throne in the hearts of men (Ezekiel 28). He had come to bind the old serpent.

Yet, as I said, we must not be too severe with these men. Every faithful gospel preacher wants success. We all want to see the Word of God run swiftly and run well. We long to see Satan fall, sinners converted, and Christ triumphant over the hearts of men. Such desires are right and good. But, when the Lord condescends to grant us a little usefulness in this great work, we tend to forget that we are only instruments by which he works (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). We can do nothing! Our hearts are easily depressed when we see no success, and just as easily elated when we taste success. There are few who can, like Samson, kill a lion without telling others of their great feat (Judges 14:6).

Paul's warning to Timothy is well-founded and should be constantly heeded (1 Timothy 3:6). It is the gospel we preach, not

the ability we possess to preach it, that is the power of God unto salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18-24).

### Illustration: Owen about Bunyan's Preaching Satan

*Second*, Satan is an enemy under the complete dominion and control of our great Savior. He who saw Satan fall is the one who fell him! He cast Satan out by his death on the cross, binding the Deceiver by his almighty power as Lord over all, lest he continue to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:1-3). He causes Satan to fall every time he saves a sinner by his omnipotent grace (Matthew 12:29; John 12:28-32).

While it is exciting and joyous to see Satan's power broken, we ought rather to expect it than be surprised by it (Ezekiel 28:11-19). Satan does not and cannot move or wiggle without our Master's permission. Yes, he walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; but he is a chained lion, without power, a lion with neither fangs nor claws to harm God's elect. He is God's devil, not God's rival!

### Things We Fear

*Third*, I pray that our God will graciously teach us that nothing can ever hurt us. Our Savior's promise is as clear as it is great: — *“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you”* (v. 19).

Without question, God's servants during this apostolic era were given special powers, gifts which no man has possessed since that day. So the words of this verse are to be taken literally, in so far as those men were concerned (Mark 16:18; Acts 28:3-5).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Lord's disciples were not crazed snake handlers! He did not promise them (or us) security against idiocy! — He promised them (and us) protection as they went about serving his interests, preaching the gospel.

Yet, this 19<sup>th</sup> verse is our Savior's promise to us as well. Understand the serpents and scorpions as figurative representations of the power of the enemy. The Lord Jesus here promises us that satanic power will never harm God's elect (2 Timothy 3:1-14). Neither the poison of sin, nor the sting of the scorpion, nor the bite of the serpent shall hurt God's elect. Neither the poison of false doctrine, nor the sting of persecution, nor the serpent of hell shall harm one of God's own (Romans 16:20). Indeed, "*Nothing shall by any means hurt you*" (Psalm 91:9-13; Proverbs 12:21; Isaiah 3:10; 11:8-9; Hosea 2:18; Romans 8:35-39). No enemy can hurt us. Satan cannot hurt us. Sickness shall not hurt us. Trials shall not hurt us. Wicked men shall not hurt us. All our sorrows and woes shall never hurt us. Death shall not hurt us. Yes, at last, even sin itself shall not hurt us (Revelation 21:4).

### **Electing Love and Saving Grace**

*Fourth*, in all things and above all things, we ought always to rejoice in God's electing love. Here is a cause for true joy! — "*Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven*" (v. 20). There is a book called the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 13:8; 17:8). In that blessed book all the names of God's elect were written before the world began. Eternally, immutably, forever written in heaven!

Yes, in Christ Jesus' gracious hand,  
The Book of Life is placed.  
The names of His elect there stand,  
Nor can they be erased!

God's election is our security. Yes, we are secured by the blood of Christ, by the seal of the Spirit, and by the gift of grace. But all these things are the result of and flow from God's electing love (Jeremiah 31:3). And that electing love ought to give us constant joy before our God. As it caused David to dance before the ark (2 Samuel 6:12-21), our election to eternal life ought to make our hearts dance with joy before our God. It was his

election by the grace of God that comforted David on his death bed (2 Samuel 23:1-5); and it is election that comforts God's saints in all ages as they leave this world.

Is your name written in heaven? There is only one way anyone on earth can ever know whether his name is written in this book. The only way a sinner can know that his name is written there is by faith in Christ. I know that my name is there because I believe on the Son of God, and God has declared, "*He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life.*" — "*And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*" (Revelation 20:15).

# Chapter 66

## Our Savior's Only Joy

Luke 10:21-24

“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and *he* to whom the Son will reveal *him*. And he turned him unto *his* disciples, and said privately, Blessed *are* the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen *them*; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard *them*” (Luke 10:21-24).

There are five tremendous lessons revealed in these verses which deserve our careful attention. May God the Holy Spirit inscribe them upon our hearts.

### Our Savior's Joy

*First*, we learn from these verses that which is the joy of God our Savior. — The only thing revealed in the Book of God that gives joy to the Lord Jesus Christ is the salvation of his people.

This is the only place on record in the four Gospels of our Savior rejoicing. We read that in that hour “*Jesus rejoiced in spirit.*” Three times we are told that our Lord Jesus Christ wept

(Luke 19:41; John 11:35; Hebrews 5:7). Once only we are told that he rejoiced. And what was the cause of our Savior's joy? It was the conversion of lost souls, the salvation of poor, needy sinners. It was the reception of the gospel by the weak and lowly, the poor and despised, the downtrodden and outcasts, when the "*wise and prudent*" on every side rejected it.

Our blessed Lord no doubt saw much in this world to grieve him. He saw the obstinate blindness and unbelief of the multitudes and wept. But when he saw a few poor men and women receiving the glad tidings of salvation, his holy heart was refreshed. He saw it and was glad. The only thing I find in the Book of God that causes him joy is the salvation of his people. Yet, of this one thing we are assured repeatedly (Micah 7:18-20; Zephaniah 3:14-17; Hebrews 12:1-2).

This fact ought to encourage sinners to seek God's mercy and grace in Christ. If he delights in mercy, if he rejoices in the salvation of sinners, if the conversion of lost souls makes the Son of God rejoice, why should any sinner doubt that he will be gracious to him?

Our Savior's example in this ought to inspire us to seek such a heart of compassion and mercy toward needy souls. Spirit of God, stamp my Master's image on my heart! Give me the grace to follow his example! Did the Son of God weep over the lost? – Shall we care nothing? Did he have compassion upon the rich young ruler who walked away from him? – Shall we harden our hearts against such? Did he rejoice in the salvation of sinners? – Shall we not rejoice in the same?

I fear we find joy in the very things that ought to grieve us most and grieve over things that are really of no consequence. The multitudes around us are walking in the broad way that leads to destruction, careless, hardened, and unbelieving. Few, precious few, believe to the saving of their souls! How we ought to rejoice in the conversion of sinners! How we ought to labor for it! — "*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins*" (James 5:19-20).

How can we be so indifferent in our attitude regarding the salvation of eternity bound sinners? Do we not realize that sinners around us are in immediate danger of eternal torment, perishing without Christ? We fail, I fear, to look upon the conversion of lost sinners as a miracle of grace, a miracle as great as the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Perhaps we find so little relish and joy in our souls over the salvation of sinners simply because we have begun to look upon the grace of God, the blood of Christ, and covenant mercy as common, ordinary things. God save us from such horrid thoughts!

### Divine Sovereignty

*Second*, we see in this passage a lesson about Divine sovereignty. Let us always recognize and bow to this fact. — The Lord God Almighty is absolutely sovereign in the exercise of his saving mercy. — *“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight”* (v. 21).

Yes, our Savior rejoiced in the exercise of sovereignty by the Holy Lord God; but he rejoiced in the exercise of sovereignty to the salvation of perishing souls. It is not merely the concept of sovereignty that gives us hope, joy and peace, but the gracious exercise of it!

The meaning of these words has been twisted by many perverted minds. Be sure you understand what the Master’s words here mean. They do not express joy at the fact that multitudes perish, but at the fact that some are saved. When the Master said, *“I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes,”* he was simply saying, “Father, I thank you that you have in your infinite goodness revealed these things to these chosen babes, though you have in just judgment hidden them from those who, being wise and prudent in their own eyes, will not repent.” Similar expressions are found in Isaiah

12:1 and Romans 6:17.

Having said that, be sure you understand this. — The God of the Bible, the only true and living God is absolutely sovereign and always exercises his sovereign right over men, especially in the exercise of his saving mercy, love and grace in Christ. This fact is as plainly revealed in Holy Scripture as the fact that God is! It is not a deep, complicated, indiscernible mystery, but a plainly revealed truth of the Bible. It is so plainly revealed that it cannot be denied or misunderstood except by those who refuse to bow to Divine Revelation. Yes, it is as high as heaven and as deep as hell. Yet, it is as plain as the noon day sun.

Why are some converted and others remain dead in sins? Why does God send the gospel to one land and leave another groping about in the darkness and superstition of idolatry? Why do some believe while others believe not? No answer can or should be given to these question by any mortal other than this: — *“Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight”* (John 10:25-27; Romans 9:13-16).

Yet, the fact of God’s sovereignty does not in any way destroy or even contradict the fact that every man is responsible for his own soul. The fact is, if we are saved, it is all God’s work, God’s gift, and God’s operation. But if we are lost, if we perish, if we go to hell, it will be our own fault alone, our own work alone, our own blame alone.

Wherever the gospel is hidden, wherever eyes are blinded, there is a just and right cause (Proverbs 1:23-33; Matthew 15:38). Israel was cut off because of their unbelief (Romans 10:20). Wherever grace is given, wherever Christ is revealed, wherever salvation comes, there is no cause except in God himself. — *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 6:23). God’s sovereignty does not nullify our responsibility. That same God who does all things according to the counsel of his own will; always addresses sinners as responsible and accountable creatures, whose blood shall be on their own heads if they are lost (Proverbs 29:1; Matthew 23:37-38).

## Objects of Grace

*Third*, we learn something here about the objects of God's saving grace. The Lord God commonly hides the gospel from the wise and prudent and reveals it unto babes. Our Savior said, "*Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes.*"

Those words do not imply that some are naturally more deserving of God's grace and salvation than others. We are all alike sinners, and merit nothing but wrath and condemnation. Rather, our Lord is here simply stating a fact. — The wisdom of this world often makes people proud, and increases their natural enmity to Christ and the gospel. The man who has no pride of knowledge, or fancied morality to fall back on often has the fewest difficulties to get over in coming to the knowledge of the truth. The publicans and sinners are often the first to enter the kingdom of God, while the Scribes and Pharisees stand outside.

Beware of self-righteousness! Nothing so blinds the eyes of our souls to the beauty of the gospel as the vain, delusive idea that we are not so ignorant and wicked as others, and that we have a character that will bear God's inspection. Blessed is that person who has learned that he is "*wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*" (Revelation 3:17). To see that we are vile is the first step towards being made righteous. To know that we are ignorant is the beginning of all saving knowledge. God's grace commonly comes to the most unlikely, most unexpected, and most despised (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

## Christ's Pre-eminence

*Fourth*, this passage shows us the pre-eminence of our Lord Jesus Christ. The sinner's only Savior and Friend has all power put into his hands. — "*All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him*" (v. 22).

These words are intended to set before us a sense of the majesty and dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ as that One to whom the Father has given all pre-eminence and glory. No man but the God-man ever used words like these. They reveal to our wondering eyes a glimpse of the great mystery of our Lord's nature and person. He is the only God-man Mediator, by whom we must be saved. He is the Head over all things, and King of kings. Our Lord Jesus Christ is God the Son, one with the Father, yet distinct from the Father (1 John 5:7).

Our Master here declares that he alone is the Revealer of God to the sons of men, as the God who pardons iniquity, and loves sinners for his Son's sake: — "*No man knoweth who the Father is but he to whom the Son will reveal him.*" Robert Hawker rightly observed...

"Nothing can be more plain, than that it became impossible for the creation of God to know anything of Jehovah, in his three-fold character of persons, but by the immediate act of the Son, begotten into his mediatorial character, God-Man in one person, thereby to reveal him. By this voluntary act of the Son of God, and by this humbling himself, in order to make this revelation through the medium of the manhood, he hath done that, which, without this union of nature, never could have been done. And by this act, he hath brought in a new glory to the Godhead, in that his creatures have now a knowledge of the Father, Son, and Spirit; and which opens to the felicity of God's intelligent creation to all eternity."

This great, glorious, exalted, sovereign God-man, this great Savior is exactly the Savior we need. Let us confidently rest our souls, yea our lives, yea all things upon him. He is one who is "*mighty to save.*" Many and weighty as our sins are, Christ can bear them all. Difficult as the work of our salvation is, Christ is able to perform it. If Christ was not God as well as man, we might indeed despair. But with such a Savior as this, we may begin boldly, and press on hopefully, and await death and judgment without fear. Our help is laid on one that is mighty

(Psalm 89:19). Christ over all, God blessed forever will not fail any who trust Him.

## Our Great Blessedness

*Fifth*, we are reminded of the great blessedness that is ours. There is no greater privilege afforded sinners on this earth than the blessed privilege of hearing and knowing the gospel of God's free, sovereign, saving grace in Christ. — *“And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them”* (vv. 23-24).

I am sure none of us will ever comprehend on this earth the full significance of those words. I am sure we have no idea how blessed we are to live in this gospel age. The difference between the knowledge of believers in the Old Testament and those of this age, we simply cannot conceive.

Without question, those saints in the Old Testament trusted Christ, looked for and to the coming Savior by faith. They believed the gospel. They believed in the resurrection and a life to come. But the coming of Christ and the accomplishment of redemption by his death, his resurrection and exaltation unlocked hundreds of Scriptures which before were closed, and cleared up scores of doubtful points which before had never been solved. As Paul puts it, *“the way into the holiest was not made manifest, while the first tabernacle was standing.”* (Hebrews 9:8).

But there is more to be learned from these words than merely the advantages of this age over former ages. Our Lord would have us constantly aware that the privilege of hearing the gospel, the privilege of having a place of worship, a regularly established, faithful gospel ministry, and the blessed fellowship of his people is the greatest privilege God can give to any sinner in this world. – The greatest curse would be for him to take from us this great privilege!

What a deep sense of our own debt to God we ought to have! What a great sense we ought to have of our great responsibility to make the gospel known to immortal souls! Let us strive to make good use of our many privileges. Having the great privilege and benefit of the gospel, let us take care that we do not neglect it. — *“To whomsoever much is given, of them will much be required”* (Luke 12. 48).

# Chapter 67

## The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked *on him*, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*, And went to *him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that

shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:25-37).

We are not told whether this is a narrative of fact or merely a story, a parable, our Lord used to illustrate the gospel, because that is really unimportant. The story here given by our Savior, like all those he so masterfully wove into his preaching, was intended to teach spiritual, eternal truths of the gospel.

## Parable's Purpose

Our Master's purpose in giving us this story was to show us the utter impossibility of salvation by the works of the law, and his own glorious, sweet blessedness and efficacy as the sinner's only Friend.

That this is the intent of the narrative before us is obvious. The story was given in response to the question raised by a lost, self-righteous religionist, a man who hoped to justify himself before God and in his own conscience by his religious devotion. That proud worm, by his pretense of sincerity, “*tempted*” (tried to confuse) the Lord Jesus. His only intent was to catch the Lord Jesus in his snare; but the Savior seized the opportunity to teach the gospel, causing the wrath of man to praise him (Psalm 76:10).

You will observe that the Lord Jesus sent this proud lawyer to the law to show him his evil, to convince him of his sin, to silence him. That is the purpose of the law.

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:19-20)

When blessed of God to the sinner's heart, the law is our schoolmaster, pointing us to Christ and always bringing us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith in him (Galatians 3:24). It is never made a yoke of bondage to God's saints. We who trust Christ are dead to the law; and the law is dead to us (Romans 7:4;

Galatians 2:19). We are not under the law, but under grace. We are assured of this blessed fact so often and in so many ways that error concerning the believer's freedom from the law is inexcusable (Romans 6:14, 15; 10:4; Galatians 5:1-4, 18). The law was made, not for a righteous (justified) man; but for the unrighteous (1 Timothy 1:5-11). Therefore, when this proud lawyer sought to trap our Lord Jesus, the Master sent him to the law to condemn him in his own conscience.

## A Lawyer and the Law

“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (vv. 26-27).

The word “*lawyer*” here does not refer to the kind of lawyer we think of when we use that term. This lawyer was a lawyer of the absolute worst kind. He was worse than an ambulance chaser or one of those “Call Me, Let’s Sue” men you see in television ads. This man was a religious lawyer, a scribe. He was one of those men who was absolutely devoted to religion, religious works, and religious activity. He was a man who thoroughly believed he could make himself worthy of God’s acceptance, if he just put his mind to it. He is called a “*lawyer*” because he was a scribe, a promoter of law religion.

As I said before, his purpose in raising his learned and pious question was to tempt the Son of God. He was trying to get him to say something against the law. He was trying to catch him in a slip up, and thereby demonstrate the Master’s ignorance of Holy Scripture. He wanted to discredit the Lord of Glory and discredit the gospel of God’s free, sovereign, saving grace in him. So he asked a very sincere sounding question. — “*Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” You will remember that this was the same question raised by the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17. They

were both cut from the same bolt of cloth. Both sought eternal life by the works of the law, by the doing of their own hands.

The Master answered him with a question of his own. — “*What is written in the law? How readest thou?*” The man came seeking to justify himself by the law, so the Master sends him to the law, because those who seek righteousness by the law simply do not understand the law (Galatians 2:19-21; 3:10; 4:21).

When the Lord Jesus asked him what the law required, this fine specimen of religion answered him without the least hesitation. — “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.*” He had a bad case of versitus. Like most religious people, he had a verse for everything. This was one of those Scriptures the Pharisees carried in their phylacteries. They recited it every morning and every evening, like a papist rubs his rosary beads, for good luck. This poor, deluded soul, this empty-hearted, empty-headed religionist, like the Jews at Sinai, was perfectly confident that he had done this and would continue to do it in a manner completely acceptable to God.

## This Do

Then, in verse 28 the Lord Jesus “*said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.*” — This man understood the letter of the law, but nothing of the spirit. Our Lord here declares what this poor man did not understand, and, indeed, few men understand: — Eternal life is not to be had without a complete and perfect obedience to all that is required in the law. If you would be saved (justified, sanctified, assured of acceptance, made righteous in any way or to any degree) by keeping the law, you have got to keep it! You must love God perfectly. You must love your neighbor (your worst, most implacable enemy) perfectly. In other words, it is impossible to obtain eternal life by obedience to the law for one very obvious reason: — No sinful man can obey God’s law!

The Master’s declaration is just this: — Righteousness cannot

be obtained by law obedience, by legal works, by anything a man can do. But, like most people, this man ignored the Lord's word and, rather than acknowledging his failure and sin, attempted to justify himself. He was embarrassed and had to cover himself. — *“But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?”* (v. 29).

If only he could make the law say and require less than it does, he might have been able to find comfort in it, or at least make people think he found comfort in it. Therefore, ignoring what he had just quoted about loving God with all his heart, he says, *“And who is my neighbor?”* The indication seems to have been. I have loved my neighbor and do. Perhaps he was saying, “I love my family, my relatives, my kinsmen, my friends, and my nation.” That is easy. They're yours. But your neighbor, those God requires us to love, and love as ourselves, are not our family and friends, but our worst enemies.

The whole purpose of this story of the good Samaritan is to show us that the law of God requires that we do what no man can do; and that Christ Jesus, the God-man our Mediator, has done for his elect precisely what the law requires. The Lord Jesus Christ came down here to fulfill the law for us, loving God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. This is what the story of the good Samaritan declares (Romans 5:6-8).

## A Certain Man

“And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead” (v. 30).

Remember, our Lord's purpose here is to answer this religious legalist who desired to justify himself. He is not giving out a lesson on brotherly love. He does that elsewhere. To do so here would be like saying to this self-righteous legalist, “You're on the right course. See that you follow through and you will be

just fine.” Our Lord’s purpose here was to expose this man’s sin, show him the utter folly of his hope, and tear down his refuge of lies. Our Lord’s purpose was to show this man and us the utter necessity of salvation by a Substitute.

This “*certain man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho*” is our father Adam<sup>12</sup> who went down from his original state, fell among thieves, who stripped him, wounded him, and left him half dead.

This describes the sin and fall of our race in that certain representative man Adam. As this man went down from Jerusalem, which stood on high ground, to Jericho, which was in a low place, so our father Adam and all the human race in him went down. How far down we went, how far we fell, when Adam sinned in the Garden, when we sinned against God in him, no mortal can know, let alone declare! — “*Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions*” (Ecclesiastes 7:29).

Adam fell from a state of happiness into misery, from a state of uprightness into a state of groveling baseness, and from a state of righteousness into a state of sin. Our father Adam fell from a state of acceptance and communion with God into a state of separation and woe, from a state of blessedness into a state of cursedness, and from a state of peace (Jerusalem) into a state of condemnation (Jericho). He fell from a state of unity with God into a state of enmity against God, from a state of worship into a state of sensuality, and from a state of knowledge and prosperity into a state of ignorance and poverty.

This man, in his journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among thieves. So did we! When we forsook our Creator, when we rebelled against God, our race fell into the hands of two thieves, sin and Satan. How they have robbed us! They robbed us

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12 There are only two certain men mentioned in the text. The thieves, the priest, and the Levite were utterly insignificant. So there are but two men with whom God works, two men by whom God deals with all men: The First Adam and The Last Adam (A Certain Man and a Certain Samaritan) (Romans 5:12-20).

of great honor, the image of God in which we were created. They robbed us of great nobility, living for the Glory of God! These thieves left us in a state of utter depravity and spiritual deprivation. They have stripped us of righteousness, leaving us naked. — Fallen man is a naked creature, has nothing with which to cover himself, and stands exposed to the law, justice, and wrath of God. We are a people totally destitute of righteousness, with no ability to perform righteousness, justify ourselves, and bring ourselves back into Divine favor!

As they have stripped us and robbed us, sin and Satan have wounded us and left the entire human race half dead. This does not suggest anything to deny the total depravity and spiritual death of our race. Rather it is an accurate picture of it. We are alive physically, but dead spiritually. We are under the sentence of eternal death; but it is a sentence that is not yet executed. Like the nation described in Isaiah 1, we are a people wounded with an incurable wound, but for the balm of sovereign grace, covered from head to toe with wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores. The plague of our race is a heart plague that none can heal but the Son of God.

### A Priest and a Levite

“And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked *on him*, and passed by on the other side” (vv. 31-32).

These two men represent the whole law of God, moral and ceremonial, and show us the utter inability of the law to save, or even to help fallen man. As such, they represent the whole of works religion. — They declare in loud, clear, thunderous words, “*By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified*” (Romans 8:1-4; Hebrews 10:1-9).

Look at the picture drawn by our Lord in Luke 10:31-32. When this priest saw this poor wretch, he passed by on the other side. When he saw the poor soul, naked and in such a bloody

condition, he crossed the road, lest he be defiled by coming into contact with such a corrupt, vile thing. Nothing so hardens the hearts of men as self-righteous, legalistic religion. Nothing on earth makes a man more useless to men than legalism! Nothing is more cruel than religion without Christ; and nothing makes men more cruel to one another!

*“Likewise, a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.”* — Can you picture the scene? This fine Levite comes over, takes a look at the poor creature laying in the gutter, wallowing in his blood, and shakes his head. I can almost hear him as he crosses the street: He shakes his head and says in very humble, teary tones, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” But he still crossed the street without any effort to help, comfort, or assist the man.

The priest and the Levite both passed by without the slightest movement of heart toward this poor soul. They did not help. They could not help. They did not and could not fetch any help. And they did not even point the poor man in the direction of help. They left him exactly as they found him. He was not one wit better off because they passed his way!

A thought just flashed across my mind and burned into my heart. — O my God, don’t allow me to come into contact with any needy soul and leave him no better off than he was before!

Still, the thing our Lord is showing us here is the utter inability of the law to help fallen man. It was never the purpose of the law to do so. Be sure you hear and understand what God says about this. The law is unbending. There is no mercy in the law. The law will not and cannot abate its demands. The law makes no allowance for the weakness of our condition. The law gives no consideration to age, position, knowledge, environment, or circumstance. The law simply demands perfection or death. The law leaves us where it finds us. The law is no milder in this Gospel age than it was at Mt. Sinai. It will not and cannot accept an imperfect, though very sincere, obedience. It demands perfect holiness, inward and outward, without a flaw.

The law is deaf to the cries of sorrow, repentance, and fear. It

demands perfection. It offers no relief, no hope, no cure to anyone. The law can do nothing except show us our nakedness, our wretchedness, our helplessness, our guilt, and our doom. It can do nothing else. All the law does is condemn and kill. It cannot give life. It is a ministration of death, nothing else. It terrifies, but never comforts. It condemns, but never gives hope. It brings despair, but never peace. It wounds, but never heals. The law cannot come down to us. The law cannot touch us. All the law can do is condemn and kill.

The gospel does not teach men and women to live by or obey the law. The gospel teaches us to seek to honor God in all things; but it never threatens condemnation or punishment. It never inspires or motivates by law. God's elect are "*free from the law.*" Yet, the law demands satisfaction. The law must be fulfilled.

Help must be had from another. We need someone to come to us in our low, fallen, depraved, helpless ruin, someone who will be a true friend, a friend to meet our need, without looking to us for anything. Thanks be unto God, the Lord Jesus Christ is just such a Friend! Look at Luke 10:33-35.

## A Certain Samaritan

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*, And went to *him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.”

This Good Samaritan is the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. No, our Savior was not a Samaritan, but a Jew, a son of Abraham. But the Jews called him a Samaritan (John 8:48) and treated him as such, as one who was utterly hated and despised by them. Our Lord takes the title. He came here to love his neighbor, to do good to his neighbor, to help his fallen neighbor,

to save those who are his sworn enemies (Romans 5:6-8).

Look at these three verses in Luke 10, and learn how the Son of God saves poor, needy sinners by his almighty grace. He took a journey. That represents our Savior's incarnation and sojourn in this world (2 Corinthians 8:9).

He came to where we were. Not only did the Lord of Glory take into union with himself our nature and come into this world, in his substitutionary, sin-atonement death our blessed Savior came to where we were. He was made to be what we are by nature, made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was made a curse for us, his cursed people, that we might receive the gift of life by his Spirit (Galatians 3:13-14).

When he saw us, he had compassion on us. He saw us, loved us, and delighted in us as his chosen bride and companion from everlasting (Psalms 21:1-2; 45:13-14; Proverbs 8:22, 30-31; Jeremiah 31:3). His love and compassion remains the same, unchanged and perfect, through all the ages of time and in all the circumstances of our lives!

At the appointed time of love, he came to us! - First, the Samaritan came to where this man was. Then, "*he went to him.*" When we could not and would not come to him, he came to us in sovereign, saving mercy. He did not come to offer help. — He came to help! He bound up all our wounds: heart and conscience wounds. He healed our wounds by pouring in the oil of his Spirit (Grace) and the wine of his blood.

Then, he set us on his own beast. I cannot say with certainty what this beast refers to; but it may refer either to the red horse of his holy humanity (Zechariah 1:8), or to the white horse of his gospel, upon which he rides triumphantly through the ages of time.

Next, he brought us into his Inn, the Church and House of God, where he sees to our constant care. The host of the inn is a faithful pastor, a gospel preacher, one who feeds the Lord's people with knowledge and understanding (Jeremiah 31:5). The two pence is the price of redemption under the law - ½ shekel

(Exodus 30:11-16). Two things are required for the redemption of our souls: his blood and his righteousness. The Lord Jesus has charged his servants to take care of his people; and he promises his servants that whatever it costs to care for his people, he will repay when he comes again.

## An Impossible Command

Now, look at verses 36-37. Here, our Lord shuts us up to the free grace of God in him. He does so by issuing an impossible command.

“Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

If you would justify yourself, this is all you have to do. Be a neighbor, be a good Samaritan. Love your most implacable enemies, all of them, just like you love yourself. Pay all their debt to God. Lift them from the dead. Deliver them from the curse. Bring them to Glory. If you would justify yourself, all you have to do is meet all the demands of God's holy law perfectly, without a flaw. The only way a sinner can ever be saved, the only way we can ever be justified with God is by Christ, by faith in the Son of God (Romans 3:19-26, 31; 5:12-21).

# Chapter 68

## “One Thing is Needful.

Luke 10:38-42

“Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:38-42).

In these five short verses we have one of the most instructive bits of history recorded in Holy Scripture. It describes an event in Bethany, at the home of Martha and Mary, and their brother, Lazarus.

Bethany was a little town on the east side of the Mount of Olives, about two miles east of Jerusalem. Today it is called El-‘Azariyeh, perhaps because it was there where Lazarus lived, died, and was raised from the grave by the Word of the Lord Jesus.

When the Lord Jesus and his disciples came to Bethany, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, being true disciples themselves, opened their home to the Lord Jesus and his servants, and received them with warmth and hospitality (Hebrews 13:1-2). Apparently, our Savior frequently visited in the home of this

beloved family. But this particular visit is recorded by Luke, because there are lessons to be learned from this story involving Martha, Mary, and the Lord Jesus, which the Holy Spirit intends never to be forgotten. When we connect this event with the things recorded in John 11 and 12, it gives us a very instructive picture of the inner life of a family who loved Christ and was loved of Christ.

## No Exemption from Trouble

*First*, let us be reminded that faith in Christ is no exemption from trouble. Believing families have troubles just like other families. We realize, of course, that grace does not run in bloodlines. The fact is we seldom see whole families walking with God and worshipping him. No one is saved because he is related to someone who is saved (John 1:11-13). Salvation comes to sinners who are chosen of God (Romans 9:16), redeemed by Christ (Galatians 3:13-14), and born of the Spirit (Psalm 65:4).

Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were the exception. Here are three siblings living under one roof. And all three of them worshipped God. What a blessing! Yet, this godly household at Bethany was not exempt from trouble. Grace is no exemption from trouble. Faith in Christ is no exception from heartache. Salvation is no exemption from adversity.

They had trouble with sin because they were yet sinners. Martha appears to have lost her temper. She said things she wished she had not said, and did things she wished she had not done. They had trouble with sickness, bereavement, and death because they lived in a sin-cursed world, just like we do, where such things are common. We sometimes ask, "Why me? Why mine?" We might better ask, "Why not me? Why not mine?" And they had trouble with persecution because they were devoted to Christ. When Mary anointed the Savior with her precious ointment, Judas mocked her (John 12:3-5). When Lazarus was at the table with the Lord Jesus, the Pharisees sought to kill him (John 12:10). Martha, Mary, and Lazarus had experienced the power of his grace. They believed him. They walked in sweet

communion with him, served him, and sought to make him known to others. Because they loved Christ and followed him, they were despised and persecuted of men.

Grace does not exempt us from trouble; and true godliness is not perfection. God has fixed it so that his people in this world can never have any grounds for boasting, self-confidence, and self-righteousness. We must ever look to Christ.

## Individuals

*Second*, we see in this beloved family a clear example of the fact that God's saints are individuals. Genuine believers are often people of different temperaments and personalities. How very different Martha and Mary were! Both were faithful disciples of Christ. Both were believers. Both were born of God, converted by grace, and justified. Both honored Christ, when few gave him honor. Both loved the Savior. And both were loved by the Savior. Yet, they were obviously of different temperaments and personalities.

Martha was an active, impulsive, strong-willed, hard-working woman. She felt things strongly and spoke her mind openly. She was a woman truly devoted to Christ. She was cumbered with much serving, but she was serving! — Mary was a quiet, contemplative woman, more easy-going than Martha, but not less firm in her convictions. She felt things deeply, but said far less than she felt. She was a woman genuinely devoted to Christ!

Martha, when the Lord Jesus came to her house, was delighted to see him and immediately began to make preparations for his entertainment in the most lavish manner she could. — Mary also rejoiced to see the Lord coming into their home, but her first thought was to sit at his feet and hear his word.

Grace reigned through righteousness in them both. But each of those ladies showed the effect of grace in different ways and at different times. We need to remember these things. We must never imagine that this person or that is not converted simply because he or she does not have our temperament and

personality. (What foolish pride!) God's sheep all have their own peculiarities. The trees of the Lord's garden are not all exactly the same. All are trees of righteousness. All are cedars. But they all come in different shapes.

All true believers are alike in principle things. All confess their sins. All trust the Lord Jesus alone as their Savior, finding in him alone all wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). Yet, in many, many ways believers are different. In the church and kingdom of God we have both Marthas and Marys. I thank God for both!

## Influence of Carnal Care

*Third*, I am certain the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record this event at Bethany to remind us of the fact that carnal cares have a way of choking out the influence of God's Word in our lives. The cares of this world that legitimately demand our attention may become a snare to our souls, if we allow them to come between us and the worship and service of our Redeemer. — Nothing is so dangerous to our souls as the care of this world.

Verse 40 says, "*Martha was cumbered about much serving.*" Her anxiety to provide the best entertainment possible for her honored guests put her under tremendous pressure. (She had 15 to 16 or more unexpected guests drop in for dinner!) Her excessive zeal concerning temporal things caused her, for a brief period, to forget far more important spiritual things. She got carried away in herself. After a while her conscience began to torment her. She knew her thoughts were terribly selfish and sinful. But when she found herself serving tables, waiting on everyone, cleaning up the spills all by herself, while Mary sat leisurely hearing the Savior's word, she got a little ruffled. — There was a warfare going on in her soul.

## Warfare Within

Martha's biting conscience and the pressure of her labor

combined, and the old man Adam broke out into an open complaint, “*Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?*”

How sad! Martha, for a moment, forgot who she was and to whom she was speaking. She brought upon herself a solemn rebuke and an embarrassing word of reproof that must have made a lasting impression. — “*How great a matter a little fire kindleth!*” All of this happened because Martha allowed the innocent, household affairs of preparing dinner to come between her and her Lord. Her anger with her sister degenerated into something far worse. – Anger with her God!

Martha’s fault should be a perpetual warning to us all. Let us ever beware of the cares of this world (Matthew 13:22). She was doing things that needed to be done and was doing them for the Lord Jesus; but she was overdoing them. She was consumed by them. They were important, but she made them far too important. When the cares of this world interfere with the worship of Christ, they bring leanness to our souls.

It is not open sin and the flagrant breach of God’s law alone that leads souls to eternal ruin. Far more often than not, it is an excessive attention given to things that are perfectly legitimate in themselves. We must ever hold the things of this world with a very loose hand and never allow anything to have first place in our hearts but Christ (Matthew 6:33, Colossians 3:1-3). All temporal things need to be labeled in our minds with a skull and cross bones as poison. Used in moderation, they are blessings. Excessively cherished, they are a positive curse. That which we purchase by giving up worship and communion with Christ, we purchase at a very high price! — “*Beware of covetousness!*” J. C. Ryle rightly observed, “A little earth upon the fire within us will soon make that fire burn low.”

Yet, you and I must learn to leave God’s servants and God’s people to God’s care (Romans 14:4). God’s people are God’s people. They are not yours; and they are not mine. They are his. God’s servants are God’s servants. They are not yours; and they are not mine. They are his. I sure wish we could learn that. They are not to be judged by us. They are not to be controlled by us.

Their lives are not to be run by us. In the New Testament every time anyone came to our Lord and complained to him about what someone else was doing, was not doing, might do, or might not do, he rebuked them sharply (Luke 9:49-50; John 21:21-22).

It is absolutely none of your business, or mine, how someone else serves Christ. It is none of your business, or mine, what someone else does for his Master, or does not do. It is none of your business, or mine, what someone else gives, or does not give. The Lord God almighty is perfectly capable of taking care of his own. Most of us have a full time job, with plenty of overtime, taking care of ourselves.

Though Martha greatly erred, she was a genuine believer. Three things demonstrate the indisputable genuineness of her faith in and love for Christ. (1.) She took his rebuke with humility as being an act of love. (2.) Two of the greatest confessions of faith to be found in the Bible fell from Martha's heart and lips (John 11:21-22 and 27). And (3.) she continued to serve the Lord in the same capacity, but with a better spirit (John 12:1-2). — Do not judge someone an unbeliever because of an evil act; and do not judge yourself to be a lost soul because of an evil act (1 John 2:1-2).

## One Thing Needful

*Fourth*, our Savior here teaches us that among all the many things in this world that clamor for our attention only "*One thing is needful.*" Oh, may God teach me that! The only thing that is needful is Christ, having Christ, knowing Christ, worshipping Christ, serving Christ, and hearing his Word! Health and prosperity, property and power, rank and honor may all be good things in their place; but they are not needful. Multitudes of God's elect never attain those things in this world. Yet, they live happily, die peacefully, and enter into glory at last. The many things for which men and women struggle and fight in this world, will in the Day of Judgment, prove to be things not needful, but rather a great weight dragging them down into hell.

Only Christ is needful! If you have Christ you have all and

abound. Only grace is needful. If you have all the riches of God's grace in Christ, you have riches that shall enrich your soul forever. Only salvation is needful. If I am saved, nothing else much matters. If you are lost, nothing else should matter. Nothing else can do you any good.

## At His Feet

Let us be wise and join Mary at the Savior's feet. This is the place of mercy, grace, and salvation (Mark 5:22; 7:25; Luke 8:35). At his feet is the place of reverence, adoration, and worship (Esther 8:3; Revelation 1:17). This is the place of gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise (2 Kings 4:37; Luke 17:16; Mark 14:3). At the Savior's feet is the place we should choose, for this is the place of faith, hope, and prayer (1 Samuel 25:24; Esther 8:3; John 11:32). At his feet is the place to be chosen, because this is the place of instruction, learning, and discipleship (Acts 22:3). Here alone we learn his Word, his will, and his way. This is the place of humility, surrender, and submission (Ruth 3:8-14), consecration, devotion, and love (Luke 7:36-50).

## A Choice to be Made

If we would have, enjoy, and benefit from this one thing needful, a choice must be made. Read verse 42 again. — "*One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*" Our Lord's words are intended to make us wholehearted and single eyed. They are designed to inspire us to follow the Lord fully and walk closely with our God, making our souls' business our first business, and to think comparatively little of the things of this world (2 Corinthians 4:18-5:11).

Christ is the one thing needful. He is the believer's portion (Lamentations 3:25). Christ is a portion that shall never be taken from us (Psalms 89:28; John 10:28; Romans 8:38-39). Christ is the portion that must be chosen. He is the one Pearl of Great Price. Sell all, and buy this Pearl without money and without price!

# Chapter 69

## “Teach Us To Pray”

### Luke 11:1-4

“And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil” (Luke 11:1-4).

Without question, every heaven born soul prays. Prayer is the cry of our hearts to our Father, the breath of the new born child, the panting of the believer’s heart after God, the constant dependence of faith upon the God of all grace. Yet, I have no doubt, every child of God often cries out to the Lord Jesus Christ in his soul, like that unnamed disciple of whom Luke speaks in our text, “*Lord, teach us to pray.*” That is, unless I am utterly deceived, the cry of my heart. —“*Lord, teach me to pray!*”

Few passages of Scripture are so often quoted and about which men and women are so commonly ignorant as this. Almost any child can recite what is called by most, “The Lord’s Prayer.” The words are memorized early and recited often. Sometimes, the words are even sung. Yet, I do not doubt, there are very few who have any idea what is here taught.

The Son of God only on two occasions verbally taught us how to pray, here and in Matthew 6. Luke is not simply repeating

what Matthew said. These were two distinct occasions. The instruction in Matthew 6 is part of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount in Galilee. Here our Lord was with his disciples in Judea. There, the instruction was part of his sermon. Here his instruction is in response to the request of one of his disciples, after the Savior himself had been engaged in prayer.

*"One of his disciples" said, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."* Verses 2-13 give us our Savior's answer to that request. In this study, we will focus of attention on our Lord's instructions in verses 2-4, line by line. If we can grasp just a portion of what is written in these three verses, it will be profitable to our souls forever.

These brief, simple lines are a mine of spiritual treasure. To expound them fully is impossible. Volumes have been written on just these brief lines. Yet, there are treasures in this deep mine that have not yet been brought to the surface. I make no pretense of being able to bring out the richest diamonds or largest nuggets. When I am done there will be much, much more left unsaid than is said. But I want, by the Spirit of God, to show you what I know to be the most prominent and most important things here taught by our Savior. I want to show you how the Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray.

*"And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."*

## This is Not

This is not "The Lord's Prayer," but "The Disciples' Prayer." The Lord's prayer is found in John 17. Our Lord Jesus did not, should not have, and could not have prayed for divine forgiveness! He

had not yet been made sin for us. He had no sin to be forgiven.

This is not a prayer to be memorized and recited, but a model and representation of how we are to pray and for what. Here our Lord, knowing that we do not know what to pray for as we ought, helps our infirmities. Here he teaches us what we are to pray for and how to do it.

Never do we find the disciples reciting these words as a prayer. In fact, the only other reference made to them is in Matthew 6. And here our Lord Jesus deliberately avoided giving us an exact replica of what he said in Matthew 6. The first three petitions are the same. The rest is worded very differently, though the meaning is the same. And the doxology found in Matthew 6 is here omitted altogether.

In these few, short statements, our Lord Jesus teaches us all the vital aspects of prayer. Our prayers should be simple, sincere, spiritual, and short, avoiding everything like pretense, formality, and show. In prayer we simply spread before God, our heavenly Father, the great desires and needs of our hearts, trusting him to fulfill those desires and meet those needs by his grace for the glory of his name.

What are the great desires of the believer's heart? What are the great needs we have, which cause us to wait in utter helplessness before God. Let's look at these few verses, by which our Lord teaches us how to pray, line by line.

## "Our Father, Which Art in Heaven"

We do not pray to saints or angels, but to God our Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of glory, who is in heaven. Our God and Father is the Father of all men as our Creator (Acts 17:28). Because he is the God and Father of all men by creation, it is proper for all men to praise him and pray to him. – We must never forbid any to pray, or even discourage prayer by anyone!

But, God is the Father of his elect in a very distinct and very special sense (Colossians 1:20-22). We are the children of God

by adoption, by election, by regeneration, and by faith. Do you trust the Lord Jesus Christ? If you do, it is right for you to call God Almighty your Father, and to come to him as such in prayer. (Hebrews 4:16). We have the right, the privilege, and the bold freedom and confidence of faith to pray to God Almighty in heaven, as our Father.

When we pray privately, in our closets or with our families, and when we pray collectively in the house of God, we pray as the children of God, being taught and led by God the Holy Spirit to lift our hearts to heaven and call the God of Glory "*our Father!*" Nothing unites hearts like mutual prayer, collectively worshipping and praying to God "*our Father!*"

### "Hallowed be Thy Name"

The name of God represents all his attributes by which he reveals himself to us. His name represents his Being, all that he is. When we say, "*Hallowed be thy name,*" we are simply praying, like the Lord Jesus did, "*Father, glorify thy name*" (John 12:28).

God created the universe for his glory (Revelation 4:11; Proverbs 16:4). All providence works for his glory (Romans 11:36). God's object in saving sinners is his glory (Psalm 106:8). The object of Christ in his death was, above all else, the glory of God (John 12:28). It is the heart desire of every believer, above all else, that God's name be honored, magnified, and glorified (Psalms 35:27; 40:16; 70:4; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11). Therefore our Lord Jesus teaches us to pray, — "*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*"

### "Thy Kingdom Come"

Our first concern is and must be the glory of God himself. Our second concern is for the kingdom of God. We seek, in all our prayers, that the Lord God will be pleased to establish and enlarge his church and kingdom in this world. (Psalm 122:6-7). To pray "*thy kingdom come*" is simply to pray, "Lord, save your

people, establish your kingdom in this world.” We pray for the kingdom of grace to be filled (Romans 11:26). And we pray for the kingdom of glory to be established (2 Peter 3:13). If our hearts’ concern is for the kingdom of God, his sheep, his people, his elect, his church, let us ever pray, “*Thy kingdom come.*”

### “Thy Will be Done, As in Heaven, So in Earth”

Prayer is not us trying to get God to do our will. Rather it is a voluntary leaving of our will to his will. “Our truest happiness,” wrote *J.C. Ryle*, “is perfect submission to God’s will.” We want to obey God’s revealed will. We want men and women everywhere to surrender to and obey God’s revealed will. But here, our Lord is teaching us to sincerely and heartily surrender everything to and earnestly desire that God’s will be done in this world exactly as it is in heaven, knowing that it always is (Ephesians 1:11).

The fact is, we simply don’t know what to pray for as we ought (Romans 8:26). Most of our prayers, I fear, are accurately described by James in James 4:3. — “*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*” Let us give thanks to our ever gracious God that, even in our prayers, he overrules the evil that is in us and done by us for our good and his glory (Romans 8:26).

In all that we have seen thus far, the concern of true prayer is altogether spiritual. Our Lord Jesus teaches us to pray for the glory of God, the people of God, and the will of God. He teaches us to submit all other matters to those greater, far more important matters.

### “Give Us Day by Day Our Daily Bread”

What an instructive word this is! We are to seek God’s providential supplies for ourselves and our brethren. — “*Give us.*” We seek our daily food as a gift from God, knowing that if we have bread to eat we are fed by the hand of God.

Here we are taught to seek no more than is needful for us, “bread,” not gold, just bread. And we are taught to seek no more than our “daily” provision of bread. “Give us day by day,” or as our Lord told us in the Sermon on the Mount, “*this day our daily bread.*”

As we look to our God, our heavenly Father, to provide the needs of our souls, we must also look to him to give us daily bread for our bodies. We acknowledge our entire dependence upon God for life, and breath, and all things. We ask him to take charge of us, and provide for us in all that concerns this world. Our prayer ought ever to be, “*Feed me with food convenient for me*” (Proverbs 30:8).

### “And Forgive Us Our Sins”

We must especially remember this. Our Lord here teaches us to constantly acknowledge our sinfulness and constantly seek forgiveness through his blood. We are to confess our sins continually, not in the ear of an earthly priest, but in the ear of our Father in heaven, seeking forgiveness by the merit of our great High Priest who is in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9).

Our sins are here compared to debts, which we have incurred. They have made us debtors to God, who demands of us both righteousness and satisfaction. The Lord Jesus **Christ fully paid our debt**. He brought in righteousness for his elect by his obedience as our Representative. And he satisfied justice by his death. By the sacrifice of himself, our blessed Savior obtained eternal redemption with his own blood for his chosen.

Christ is our atonement! The Triune Jehovah freely forgives our debts through the merits of Christ our Lord.

Yet, though the work was finished in the purpose of God from the foundation of the world (Hebrews 4:3) and finished in the execution of that purpose at Calvary (John 19:30), we constantly need forgiveness because we constantly sin; and we constantly have it through the infinite, perpetual merit and

efficacy of Christ's blood (1 John 2:1-2).

Without question, every child of God is fully justified and forgiven of all sin before God. But it is the life of true faith to apply daily for fresh supplies of all our grace. Though full forgiveness is ours in Christ, we want it constantly, and our Father delights to hear us cry for it, constantly, confessing and acknowledging both our sin and our faith in his dear Son for the forgiveness of our sins. Though washed, we need daily to wash our feet. (John 13:10). We make no excuse for ourselves. We plead nothing in our own behalf. We simply ask for the free, full, grace and mercy of our Father in Christ Jesus.

We must never forget the next line of this sentence. – *“Forgive us our sins; for we forgive everyone that is indebted to us.”* This is the only line in this passage that our Lord expands and explains. He does so because this is the part we are most apt to overlook (Matthew 6:14-15). Our Lord here teaches us that if we unforgiving, we are yet unforgiven. If we are not gracious, it is because we have not yet experienced grace. He is not suggesting that the forgiveness of sin is conditioned upon sinners forgiving one another! He is simply declaring that grace experienced in the soul makes saved sinners gracious to one another.

There is one great blessing in being wronged by others. Injuries done by others give us opportunities to imitate our great and gracious God in forgiving those who wrong us. — *“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”* (Ephesians 4:32-5:2). Without this brotherly love our prayers are nothing but noise, the hollow echoes of empty hearts. If we cannot forgive, we have not been forgiven.

## **“And Lead Us Not Into Temptation”**

As long as we are in this world we are liable to temptation. As

long as we are in this body of flesh, we may be drawn away of our own lust, enticed by our own nature, tempted and overcome by the snare of Satan. Here our Savior says, “You need to be constantly aware of your weakness and Satan’s strength. You need to be constantly aware of your helplessness, so that you will constantly look to me for help.” Prayer, in its essence, is the conscious spreading out of my helplessness before God! Wise people seek to avoid danger. And we ask God who rules all things to keep us from the danger of temptation. May he who orders our steps order them away from temptation!

### But Deliver Us from Evil”

J. C. Ryle wrote, “We include under the word evil, everything that can hurt us, either in body or soul, and especially every weapon of that great author of evil, the devil. We confess that ever since the fall the world *‘lieth in the wicked one’* (1 John v. 19.) We confess that evil is in us, and about us, and near us, and on every side, and that we have no power to deliver ourselves from it. We apply to the strong for strength. We cast ourselves on Him for protection. In short, we ask what our Savior Himself asked for us, when He said, *‘I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil’* (John 17:15).”

Let us ever pray that God our Father may, by his unceasing, abundant grace, *“Deliver us from evil,”* from the evil that is in the world, the evil that is in our hearts, the evil one who seeks to destroy us, from all the evil that is the result of sin!

Blessed be his name, our God will deliver us from all evil! (Jude 24-25). He will deliver us from evil while we live in this evil world (1 Corinthians 10:13). When he takes us out of the world in death, he will be delivering us from evil (John 14:1-3; Isaiah 57:1-2). And in the great and glorious resurrection day, our great God will completely deliver us from all evil in resurrection glory, when he presents us before himself in the spotless perfection and beauty of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27; Jude 24-25).

# Chapter 70

## Shameless Desperation

### Luke 11:5-13

“And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if *he ask* a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him” (Luke 11:5-13).

It is very, very late midnight. All the lights are out. You're in bed. All your children are sound asleep. Suddenly someone rings the doorbell and starts knocking at the door. “Friend! Could you help me? I need some bread! A friend of mine has come unexpectedly, and I have nothing in the house to feed him!” You try to ignore the unwelcome, shameless intruder. But he knocks again. “Friend! I need some help. I need bread!” Still, you ignore

him. Then, he knocks again. “Friend, friend! I must have some bread!” Finally, you go to the door, trying not to wake the family. Without opening the door, you say in a rather angry, unsympathetic voice, “Go away. Leave me alone. Can’t you tell we are all asleep? I can’t help you.”

That silences the man, for a while. He stands on the stoop. Then, he turns to go home. But he can’t go home. He dare not go home. He still doesn’t have any bread to set before his friend who has dropped in on him. So, he comes back. He knocks on the door again, louder than before. “Friend! Friend! Friend!” he cries, till the dogs begin barking and the neighbors start opening their doors to see what’s happening. He puts his ear to the door. He knows you’re there. Finally, he hears you moving. Then, he sees a light come on inside. At last, the door opens and you hand him all the bread he can possibly use. All you want to do is get rid of him and go back to bed. All he wanted was some bread to satisfy his friend. — That is the story set before us in Luke 11:5-13.

## Context

Be sure you read this parable in its context. Is our Lord here teaching us that if we want something bad enough all we have to do is badger God into giving it to us, like a spoiled child badgers his parents into getting what he wants, or a nagging wife gets her husband to do what he does not want to do just to stop the nagging? – No. Is the Master here teaching us that if we really pray hard enough and believe strongly enough that we can get anything we want from God, if we really want it, if we just refuse to give up? – No.

Many faithful men and women, have pleaded with God to spare a dying loved one, as David prayed for his dying son, who soon buried the one for whom they had so earnestly prayed. Many parents have prayed for their rebel children, whose children perished still in unbelief. Many of God’s saints have prayed for God to relieve them of some heart wrenching trouble, as Paul prayed for God to remove his thorn in the flesh, who found that God would not grant them their request. You have

experienced this, and I have too.

Our prayers never alter God's purpose or change his will. Prayer is not the art of twisting the arm of omnipotence, getting God to do what we want him to do. Prayer has something to do with our compliance with God's will. Our prayers are effectual when our prayers are in accordance with the will and purpose of God.

This parable is part of our Lord's answer to his disciple's request, "*Teach us to pray.*" In verses 2-4 he teaches us what we should pray for and how.

"And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."

Our Lord's instruction about prayer here is not the same as that which was given in his Sermon on the Mount. Here, our Lord ends his words of instruction by telling us to seek from God the forgiveness of sin and deliverance from all evil. Then, he illustrates his doctrine by giving us the parable of the man who knocked at midnight in verses 5-13. That is the connection; and that is the secret to interpreting this parable.

In this parable our Savior is telling us how to obtain God's salvation, the forgiveness of sins and deliverance from all evil.

## Midnight

Did you ever notice how many things in the Bible took place at midnight? It was at midnight that the Lord God passed through Egypt, killed all the firstborn, and brought Israel out of the land of bondage with his mighty hand and stretched out arm (Exodus 11:4; 12:29). – That was a picture of redemption by the blood of Christ blood and by the power of his grace.

It was at midnight that Samson (Judges 16:3) took the gates

of the city of Gaza, and the two posts, bar and all, put them on his broad shoulders, and carried them away up to the top of a high hill before Hebron. – That was a picture of reconciliation by Christ's death.

It was at midnight that Ruth came into the threshing floor and laid herself at Boaz's feet (Ruth 3:8). – That portrayed a needy sinner seeking God's saving grace in Christ.

It was at midnight that the woman in 1 Kings 2:20 found her son gone and a dead one laid in his place. – That was a picture of life destroyed by sin and life restored by the wisdom of God our Savior in the exercise of his saving mercy.

Elihu said to Job's three miserable friends, "*the mighty shall be taken away without hand*" at midnight (Job 34:20). – That portrayed the withering work of God the Holy Spirit in Conviction.

When taught to understand God's righteous judgments, the Psalmist David said, "*At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments*" (Psalm 119:62). – That speaks of our gratitude to the just God, our Savior, by whom we are granted free justification.

At midnight the cry is made, "*The Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him*" (Matthew 25:6), because Christ Jesus our Lord is coming for his bride in grace and at the second advent.

It was at midnight that the Lord God shook the earth and broke open the prison doors at Philippi that held the Philippian Jailor (Acts 16:25).

And it was at midnight that Paul and those who traveled with him across the stormy sea drew near some country hoping for safety (Acts 27:27).

Every reference to midnight in the Word of God is connected with an event that clearly pictures God's wondrous works of redemption and grace in Christ. It is no accident that our Lord in this parable speaks of a needy man coming to his friend at midnight. The parable is a word of instruction, telling us how sinners obtain God's grace in Christ.

When the time of love has come, when the appointed time of mercy has arrived, when the time has come for God to save a chosen sinner, he graciously brings the object of his love into utter desperation. He creates midnight in the soul.

Is that the case with you? Are you a poor, needy sinner sitting in darkness? Once you thought you had light. Once everything was fine. Once you thought you had everything you needed. Once you presumed that you knew everything. Now, you are utterly engulfed in thick darkness. The darkness in your soul is so thick it hurts. Is that your condition? If so, this parable is especially for you.

## The Lord Jesus Christ

Our Savior was often like this importunate poor man, out at midnight, knocking for bread. Often, after a long day of labor for the souls of men, struggles with his adversaries, warfare with Satan, and heartfelt trouble, our Master went at midnight to the gate of heaven and knocked again and again, until he got as much as he needed. These things are recorded by divine inspiration in the Gospel narratives, written without emotion or exclamation. They are things at which our hearts stand still, when we suddenly come upon them. — *“He went up into a mountain to pray: and when the morning was come he was there alone.”* — Again, *“He departed into a mountain himself alone.”* And again, *“It came to pass in those days that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.”*

He continued all night. Do you see Him? Do you hear Him? Can you make out what he is asking? He stands up. He kneels down. He falls on his face. He knocks in the thick darkness that lays heavy on his holy soul. All night he prays, and refuses to faint, till the sun rises, and he goes down to his disciples like a strong man to run a race.

Yonder, in Gethsemane as he anticipated being made sin for

us, the Lord Jesus knocked, and knocked, and knocked again, until his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground! Indeed, we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Rather, our Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest in heaven, is One, *“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, and was heard in that he feared.”* Like us, he *“learned obedience through the things that he suffered.”* — *“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”*

## Conversion

However, in this passage the clear, primary thing set before us is the experience of grace in conversion. A friend of ours (God’s holy law) comes to us in his journey; and we have nothing to set before him. Oh, yes, the law of God is our true friend. It is a schoolmaster unto Christ. It is our friend, because it shuts us up to and forces us to flee to him, who is our souls’ Friend, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God’s law comes and says to us, *“Be ye holy.”* — *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”* It demands of us perfect righteousness and complete satisfaction. We are all death and sin; but the law comes, and demands life and righteousness. Immediately, we set out to do what we are told from God to do; but we find that we have nothing to set before it. The law says, *“This do, and thou shalt live”* (Luke 10:25-37). But we cannot do what the law requires. We cannot make ourselves clean (Isaiah 1:16-18).

And then, in our famine of life, and peace, and strength, we think of God in Christ. How unwelcome is the thought! He has all that we need. If we ask it of him, he will give us all we need! There is no question about that fact. Yet, if we could make any other shift we would make it.

The holy Lord God might very well and very rightly say to us, *“I do not know you. Get some of your own friends to help you.”* Indeed, we expect far worse from him. How we dread the thought of seeing him, worse yet, of him seeing us!

We turn back. We simply cannot go to God. But the intolerable pangs of hell are in our souls. Darkness is in our hearts. The fire of hell burns in our consciences. Famine in our souls has us bent to the ground in weakness. We have nothing. We must go on to God. No one else can help.

This horrid sinking goes on until hell itself is at the door. Then, we say like the four lepers at the entering in of the gate of Samaria: — “*Why sit we here until we die? Now, therefore, come and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live: and if they kill us, we shall but die.*”

I can but perish if I go,  
I am resolved to try;  
For if I stay away, I know,  
I must forever die.

I grant this is not the best frame of mind in which to come to God. We ought to come to him full of confidence, full of assurance, doubting nothing. But I never knew a sinner in my life who did.

This is not a very becoming frame of mind in which to arise and go to our Father. But every father knows that a father does not stand upon points with his son who was dead, and is alive again, who was lost, and is found.

Is there midnight in your soul? Has the law of God come demanding what you know you must give, but what you cannot give? Come, then, come now to the throne of grace.

“For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness. Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, *being* bound in affliction and iron; Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and *there was* none to help. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works

to the children of men!” (Psalms 107:9-15)

If today your friend, God’s holy law, has come to you, and you have nothing to set before him — If, in our Savior’s words, you have come to yourself today — If it is midnight in your soul — If you are now weighed in the balances and found wanting — Amid your fear, or your want, or whatever form your awakening may take, hear this word of grace and promise: — *“Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”*

Do it, as if the books were to be opened before sunrise tomorrow. Do it, as if already the thief were at your window. Go through this parable. Go through it on your knees, if not on your face. Read it; see it. This is instruction given by the Son of God himself to sinners. He is telling us how to obtain forgiveness, how to be delivered from all evil.

See the man at midnight. Imitate that man. Act out the parable in your soul’s lone midnight. Leave nothing out. Look at this poor soul in his straits. Hear his knocks sounding in the silence of the night. Hear his loud cry, and cry it after him. He needed three loaves. Do you not need three vital loaves? Do you not need life from Christ? Do you not need atonement by Christ? Do you not need the righteousness of Christ? Go to the throne of grace and tell the God of all grace what you need. — *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

## Lifelong

But conversion is not a one time thing. It is a lifelong turning to God, a lifelong coming to Christ, a lifelong struggle of soul. I have repented. I am repenting. And I shall repent. I have come to Christ. I am coming to Christ. And I shall come to Christ (1 Peter 2:1-4).

This midnight intruder represents God’s elect throughout the days of their lives in this world. So long as we live in this body of flesh, we will need to be just like this poor soul:— ever knocking

at heaven's door, ever asking, ever seeking, because we are always in great need of grace.

Let Zion's watchmen give him no rest, until he establishes his kingdom in its fulness and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth (Isaiah 62:6-7). Let us ever put God in remembrance of his covenant and plead for his grace (Isaiah 43:25-26).

## Shameless Desperation

Our great, gracious God would have us come to him in shameless desperation. — We have nothing to bring!

How often we feel ashamed to come to the throne of grace. How embarrassed we are that we seem only to seek him when we are in utter desperation. Yet, in this parable our Savior teaches us to come in just that condition. If we did not need grace, we would not need to seek it. So he tells us plainly to come in our desperation, to come shamelessly, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

“I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”  
(Luke 11:8-10)

The word “*importunity*” does not adequately express our Lord's intent. In fact, the word ought to be translated, “shamelessness!” — This was what our Lord really said: “*I say unto you,*” he said, “*though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his shamelessness he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.*”

“What shamelessness!” the man cried out, who was in bed, with his door shut. “What shamelessness!” the disturbed neighbors cried out. “What shamelessness!” the late passers-by said. “Hold your peace,” they said, “and let honest men's doors

alone at this time of night.”

“Never mind,” says our Lord on the other hand. “Never mind them. They have bread enough at home. It is easy for them to cry shame to a starving man. Never mind them. Knock on. Knock on. The man must rise if you go on knocking. Give him no rest. Well done! Knock again!”

Yes, shamelessness! “What a shameless wretch I am!” you will say about yourself, “to ask such things, to have to ask such things at my age, to knock so loud after the way I have rebelled against God, despised his grace, and trampled under my feet the blood of his dear Son!”

“At my age!” You now number your days and will blush with shame. “At my age, and only beginning to pray in any earnest! How many nights have I had no time to give to God! And, now, to expect that when I lift up my finger, and go down five minutes on my carpeted knees, God Almighty is to hasten and set everything aside to hear me!”

Yes. Repentance requires shameless humiliation, the very shamelessness with which Ruth went to Boaz at midnight on the threshing floor. As Christ says here, it takes “shamelessness” in us for proud rebels like you and me to come to the throne of grace in our souls’ midnight and sue for mercy. — There is much to aggravate our shamelessness.

- The shameful things we have to ask for: Pardon, Atonement, Grace.
- The incredibly shameful things we have to admit and confess.
- The lives we have lived.
- The way we have spent our days and nights.
- The result of our wasted lives!

It kills us to have to say such things even with our doors shut. But

it is infinitely better to say all these things in closets than have them all proclaimed from the housetops in the Day of Judgment!

Knock, man! Knock! For the love of your soul, knock! Knock as Noah's neighbors knocked once the door was shut and the rains began to fall! Knock as they knock to get into heaven after the door is shut! Knock, as they knock to get out of hell! For Christ's sake, knock! Knock until the door opens and you have obtained the blessing. Like Jacob, cry out to the Son of God, "*I will not let thee go except thou bless me!*"

## The Blessing Sought

The thing we need, the thing we must have, the thing God alone can give is the blessed gift of eternal life, grace and salvation by his Holy Spirit.

"If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if *he ask* a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:11-13)

This gift of the Spirit includes the whole experience of God's salvation, all the blessedness of God's covenant promised to his elect before the world began, flowing to every redeemed sinner by the merit, power, and efficacy of Christ's atoning blood (Galatians 3:13-14).

Just before he ends his sermon on prayer, our Lord in one word gets to the heart of his doctrine. This shameless desperation in prayer is for the Holy Spirit. It is for God's salvation. It is no longer a prayer for bread, or for a fish, or for an egg. It is not a prayer for long life, or for riches, or for good health. It is not what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed?

This is shameless importunity for life, eternal life! Our Lord would hear us saying at the end of his sermon: "*One thing do I*

*desire, and that will I seek after.*” We have wrestled at midnight when we saw Esau coming to meet us with his armed men. We have made our couches swim with tears when our sin found us out. We have fallen on our faces when death approached. But this one thing we must have. We must have Christ. We must have God’s salvation. We must have the Holy Spirit.

It is God the Holy Spirit who weds the soul to Christ. It is God the Holy Spirit who gives dead sinners life. It is God the Holy Spirit who gives us faith. It is God the Holy Spirit who sprinkles our hearts with the blood of the Lamb. It is God the Holy Spirit who speaks peace and pardon to our souls. It is God the Holy Spirit who puts on us the garments of salvation.

## The Blessing Obtained

Our Lord here promises that all who do, in the shameless desperation of faith, look to God for grace, salvation and eternal life shall obtain the blessing they seek. — *“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you....If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”* (vv. 9, 13; Hebrews 11:6; Jeremiah 29:10-15). When your midnight is no longer, when the Holy Spirit has finished his midnight work in you, then, (Oh blessed blessedness!) after grace, he will give glory, too!

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and *about* the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, *be* unto

our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:9-17)

# Chapter 71

## “The Kingdom of God is Come upon You”

Luke 11:14-20

“And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you” (Luke 11:14-20).

The claims of Christ are the claims of the sovereign King. If you do not bow to him as your King, you have not received him as your Savior. Whether you bow to him or not, he is still your King. We are all his subjects, some willingly, others unwillingly, some loyal, some rebel; but we are all his subjects. And, sooner or later, we will all bow to him. Bow to him now, and life eternal is yours. If you refuse to bow to him now, you will bow in the Day of Judgment; but eternal death will be your portion. May God give you grace now to bow. O *“kiss the Son, lest he be angry when his wrath is kindled!”*

The kingdom of God is not something yet to come. It is here. It is present. The Kingdom of God is not carnal, but spiritual. It is among you. The Kingdom of God is not a temporary kingdom, but an eternal, everlasting kingdom.

## Context

In interpreting Holy Scripture, it is of utmost importance that we interpret every passage in its context. In this case, the context is strikingly instructive. Our Lord Jesus has just told us how sinners obtain God's salvation in him. He said, "*Ask, and it shall be given you.*" That is the promise of God held before sinners throughout the Book (Romans 10:13; Mark 16:16; Acts 16:31; Isaiah 45:22). The fact is, all who are lost, all who are without Christ, all who perish under the wrath of God do so because they stubbornly refuse to seek mercy through the merits of Christ, the sinner's Substitute. "*There is none that seeketh after God!*" If you are yet without Christ, it is because you refuse to trust Christ.

## Hope

Yet, there is hope for you. I have hope for lost sinners, because I know that though our Savior waits to be gracious, his grace does not wait on the sinner. All lost sinners are like the man in our text, possessed of the devil and dumb, so dumb that they cannot and will not call upon the name of the Lord, except the Lord himself come, cast out the devil, set up his kingdom in them, loosen their tongues and cause them to call upon him by his sweet, omnipotent, irresistible grace (Psalm 65:4).

The great miracle recorded in Luke 11:14-20 is intended to show us how lost sinners are compelled by almighty grace to call upon Christ in faith. He who promises that if we ask it shall be given unto us is he who destroys the power of Satan in us and causes us to call upon him for mercy.

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
He sits the captive free,

He makes the lame to walk again,  
And causes the blind to see.

Hear Him, ye deaf! His praise, ye dumb!  
Your loosened tongues employ!  
Ye blind, behold your Savior come,  
And leap, ye lame for joy!”

## Satan's Devices

Satan's devices by which he seeks to destroy our souls are legion. We read here of a man possessed of a devil that was dumb. In other places, we see Satan's imps described as unclean spirits. Sometimes they are violent. In other places they come as blind spirits, in other places as deaf spirits. Whatever the appearance, Satan's devices are many; and they are always designed for destruction.

Do not imagine that because demonic possession is not so glaringly obvious and common today as it once was that the fiend of hell is less active or his designs less destructive. That is not the case. Men and women are still taken captive by Satan at his will. No doubt, some who read these lines are possessed of a dumb spirit, just like this poor soul. Are you like this man, possessed of a dumb spirit. Though you speak much, do you ever speak to God? Though you call upon many for many things, do you call upon the name of the Lord? If so, you do not call upon him because you have neither the will nor the ability to do so. You are spiritually dead and spiritually dumb.

Thanks, eternal thanks be unto God, the Lord Jesus Christ still makes the dumb to speak. He who cast this demon out is still in the business of casting Satan out of the hearts of men! When the time of love has come for chosen, redeemed sinners, though Satan rules in the hearts of lost, dead sinners, the Lord Jesus binds the strong man, casts him out, spoils his house, takes all his armor, and establishes the dominion of grace in their hearts by the power and grace of his Spirit for the glory of God. Only Christ can raise the dead. Only Christ can give eyes to see the

glory of God shining in his face. Only Christ can open the sinner's ears to hear the glorious sound of his grace. Only Christ can give the tongue of supplication. — But, blessed be his name, he can! Jesus Christ our Lord is mighty to save (John 12:32; Hebrews 7:25).

## Willful Unbelief

Next, I want you to see that unbelief is a willful, deliberate act. Unbelief is not something about which sinners are passive, for which they have no responsibility. Unbelief is the deliberate, willful defiance of the rebel heart. Every rebel sinner is just exactly like the people described in this passage of Holy Scripture.

It could not be denied that the Lord Jesus had cast out a devil, that he had loosened the tongue of a man who could not speak before. Those who were present could not dispute the miracle. The work of grace was as glaring and obvious as the noon day sun. Still, they would not believe.

Some wondered and marveled; but they would not believe! How many there are like them today! Many there are who marvel at electing love, stand in awe at divine predestination, wonder at the display of God's saving grace, and are astonished by substitutionary redemption, who yet believe not!

Others sought to discredit the Lord Jesus, saying he cast out the devil by the devil. They could not deny the work. So they tried to discredit the Son of God.

Still others said, "Show us a sign from heaven." Is that not amazing? Yet, it is ever the betrayal of rank unbelief in the hearts of men that demands a sign. "Show us a sign" is the cry of hell. The Jews require a sign. The Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The fact is all unbelief is inexcusable. It is not adultery that will take a sinner to hell, but unbelief! It is not theft that will take the lost to hell, but unbelief! It is not drunkenness that takes

people to hell, but unbelief! Unbelief is blamable. It is willful. It is deliberate. Those who believe not believe not because they choose to believe not. If you read these lines and continue to believe not, you will forever die under the wrath of God (John 3:14-19, 36; 1 John 5:1, 6-10).

## Christ's Divinity

There are several incidental, but divinely inspired, displays of our Savior's eternal divinity in this passage. We trust him who is both God and man in one glorious person. That man who died for us at Calvary is himself God the eternal Son. Because he is God, his obedience is of infinite worth. Because he is God, his death is of infinite merit. Because he is God, his grace is of infinite efficacy. Here are three great manifestations of our Savior's eternal divinity:

1. His Dominion over Hell — Devils obey Him!
2. His Omniscience — He knew their thoughts!
3. His Marvelous Grace — He made the dumb speak!

## Family Strife

Our Lord Jesus here declares in a parable a word of warning that needs frequent repetition. It is a warning against needless strife.

“But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself<sup>13</sup> is brought to desolation; and a house *divided* against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? therefore shall they be your judges” (vv. 17-19).

Without question, our Master is here telling these rank,

ridiculous rebels that their blasphemous assertions were as absurd as they were blasphemous. If Satan casts out Satan, his kingdom would soon fall. But there is a much needed lesson here for us. It is a lesson we are mournfully and sinfully slow to learn. — Strife between brethren is both shameful and destructive. Civil strife destroys a nation. Domestic strife destroys families. And strife between brethren destroys local churches. Strife breaks the house at the foundation; and any house broken at the foundation will soon fall.

We cannot and must not compromise the gospel of the grace and glory of God in Christ. With regard to the gospel, all God's people and all God's servants see eye to eye (1 Corinthians 16:22; Galatians 1:6-9; 5:12; Philippians 3:18-19; 2 John 1:9-11). But when it comes to matters that do not involve the gospel of Christ and the glory of God in Christ, in all matters of indifference we must cease from strife. There is no place in the house of God for petty quarrels and proud strife. The only remedy for this horrid evil is grace. O, may God teach us to be gracious! Let everyone who names the name of Christ be slow to anger, quick to forgive, anxious to serve, ready to make concessions, and hard to offend (Ephesians 4:17-5:2).

## A Confrontation

Our text ends with a confrontation. — *“But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you”* (v. 20). The Lord Jesus Christ has, by the finger of God, cast out devils, both at Calvary by the power of his blood, crushing the serpent's head, and in the saving operations of his omnipotent grace (Colossians 2:11-15). When King Jesus establishes his throne and his kingdom in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners, he makes saved sinners kings and priests unto God (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; 22:5). Thus, the kingdom of God has come and is now coming to sinners upon the earth.

# Chapter 72

## The Strong Man Armed – Bound and Cast Out

Luke 11:21-26

“When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first” (Luke 11:21-26).

From the beginning of time the prince of darkness has been at war with the Son of God, and the Son of God has been at war with him (Genesis 3; Isaiah 14; Revelation 12). It is a mutual conflict, a mutual enmity. It is ever the purpose of that fiend of hell and the myriads of demons ruled by him to topple the throne of God, usurp his authority, and destroy the souls of men. His principle weapon of warfare is religion — self-righteousness and will worship (2 Corinthians 11; Galatians 1:6-9).

But the fiend of hell, that old serpent, the devil shall accomplish nothing. He is God’s devil. He is by the omnipotent power of Christ forced into servitude. And soon he shall be cast

into hell, crushed beneath our Savior's feet and ours. Yes, he shall be crushed beneath the feet of us, poor, weak mortals he seeks to destroy (Romans 16:20).

Because he knows he has but a short time, he is in a rage (Revelation 12:12) and goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. But, blessed be God, our all-glorious, omnipotent Savior has everything in control. This lion can do nothing but roar! He cannot hurt anything or anyone in God's holy mountain, Zion! The warfare is real; but victory is sure!

Beyond these things, we know nothing. Let us be wise, and leave these matters alone. Do not investigate witchcraft, demonism, and the occult. Playing with these things is indescribably more dangerous than playing with arsenic. It is enough for us to know only what God has revealed.

In Luke 11:21-26 our Lord Jesus lifts the corner of the veil and allows us to have an instructive peek at the warfare that takes place in the spirit world for the souls of men. The Lord's instruction here is not instruction about demonology and exorcism. It is instruction about the wonders of God's almighty, saving grace in Christ.

## A Great Destroyer

In verse 21 Satan is described as a strong man armed, keeping his palace. The palace he keeps is the heart of a man. This is a picture of fallen man in his natural state and condition. We have before us a picture of all fallen men, deceived and being deceived by the prince of darkness. — *“When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace”* (v. 21).

Our hearts ought to be the throne of God, but they have become the palace of Satan. When our father Adam was the obedient servant of the Most High, his body was a temple for God's love. No more! Now, through the fall, we have become the servants of sin, and our bodies have become the workshops of Satan, *“the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”* (Ephesians 2:1-4).

Satan is here called “*a strong man.*” Who can stand against him? The monster of darkness, the red dragon of hell is well named Abaddon and Apollyon – Destroyer! He has been at the business of soul destruction for 6000 years or more. No mortal has ever been a match for him. Adam, in all his created perfection, could not stand before the great destroyer. Samson, with all his might, was no match for the prince of darkness. Solomon, with all his wisdom, was weak as water before the fiend of hell. Satan is so strong that if all men should combine against him, he would laugh at us as Leviathan laughs at the grappling hook.

Satan is strong, not simply as one possessing force, but in the sense of intense, fiendish cunning. He knows how to adapt his temptations to our besetting sins. He knows the best time to assail us. He understands that there is a time when kings go forth to battle, and he is ever ready for the fray. He is a good swordsman. He is a supreme marksman. He knows our weak places. He sees every chink in our armor. Therefore, unsuspecting men are taken captive by him at his will.

He is a strong man with a vengeance, full of fury and full of envy (Hebrews 2:9-14). We should ever bless and praise our God that there is One stronger than this fiend of hell. Satan would crush us to eternal ruin if it were not that the omnipotent Christ comes in to rescue chosen, redeemed sinners by almighty grace.

This strong man, the Destroyer, we are told here, is armed. He is armed with the most cunning deception, the most appealing temptations, and the most alluring charms. He finds in our own hearts his willing accomplices: — Our Inward Lusts — Our Stubborn Pride — Our Willful Compliance — Our Hardness of Heart! And he is armed with the lie of freewill, works religion.

The Prince of Darkness always keeps his palace; and his goods are in peace. Satan is never caught sleeping off guard. Whenever the Son of God comes, whenever the Holy Spirit begins to work, he will do everything he can to keep his palace. And the best way to keep his palace in the City of Mansoul is to keep his goods in peace.

While we sleep he sows tares. He never sleeps. He is always the busiest one around. We may neglect our souls; but Satan never does. He is always making visitations and going from place to place upon his evil business to watch after his black sheep. The sinner's heart must be carried away by storm, if it be ever taken, for there is no hope of taking the Evil Spirit by surprise. — *“He keepeth his palace. His goods are in peace!”*

Kept in peace, the unbelieving soul has no fear of God before his eyes. He has no great sense of guilt before God, no uneasiness, no tormenting conscience. He is at peace. He has all the peace of one dead!

Yet, all his strength is withered mussel, all his armor is melting plastic, all his palace is unfortified, all his goods are vulnerable before that One who is stronger than he. Thank God, there is One stronger than he! And that One who is stronger than he is the Son of God, the sinners' Friend, and he is...

## A Great Deliverer

The Lord Jesus Christ, when he comes in the saving operations of omnipotent grace, comes upon and assails the Prince of Darkness in his palace, and spoils his goods (Luke 11:22; Matthew 12:29; Isaiah 49:24-25; 53:10-12; Colossians 2:15). He comes upon the fiend of hell, binds him, overcomes him, takes away his armor, and divides his spoils.

There is an obvious reference here to Isaiah 53:12. The Lord Jesus comes and takes possession of those very goods once used by the fiend of hell for evil and makes them instruments of good in the palace of his grace!

The fact that Satan sets up and maintains an empire of sin in every human heart is a fact too obvious to be questioned by any rational person. The terrible effects of it are too well known to be denied. Here we have that fact plainly stated. “It was,” as Robert Hawker wrote, “the setting up this kingdom against God and his Christ, for which the devil and his angels are said to have been cast out of heaven and to have left their own habitation

(Revelation 12:7-12; Jude 6).” It was by Satan’s seduction of Eve that Adam was brought down, and by Adam’s transgression that the whole human race was made a fallen, corrupt, sinful race (Romans 5:12). It is Satan who works in all the children of disobedience continually (Ephesians 2:2-4).

Because Satan’s kingdom of darkness, deception, and sin takes in the entire human race, he is called “*the prince of this world*” (John 16:11). Because he seeks to destroy our souls and seeks to destroy the church and kingdom of God, he is called “*a roaring lion*” (1 Peter 5:8) and “*the dragon*” (Revelation 12:7), “*the devil*” and “*Satan*.” Here he is called “*the strong man armed*.” So powerful is his influence over the unregenerate, that men are taken captive by him at his will (2 Timothy 2:26).

How happy and thankful we ought to be to read in the Book of God that “*the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil*” (1 John 3:8). One great purpose and design of the gospel is the overthrow of Satan and his kingdom and the restoration of perfect order in God’s creation. Let us rejoice! The Son of God came into this world to “*save his people from their sins*” and “*that he might destroy the works of the devil;*” and that which he came to accomplish shall be accomplished! The Word of God reveals a threefold binding of Satan.

1. By his death upon the cross, in the accomplishment of our redemption, and by his resurrection from the grave our Savior bound Satan and broke the power of his usurped dominion over the nations of the world of Satan (John 12:31-33; Colossians 2:13-15; Hebrews 2:14-15; Revelation 20:1-6).

2. In regeneration and conversion, by the power of his grace, through the operations of his Holy Spirit in the new birth, the Son of God binds Satan in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners and takes possession of his house.

That is what is described in Luke 11:21-26. Our Savior is the man stronger than the strong man armed. He comes by omnipotent mercy into the hearts of chosen sinners, binds Satan,

casts him out, and spoils him of all. This is what happens every time he saves a sinner. He does not stand knocking at the door of the lost sinner's heart, hoping that the sinner might choose to let him enter. He knocks the door down, bolt and bar, enters the house of the ransomed soul, and sets up his throne in the heart, bringing his welcome with him. Thus it is that we have been "*translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son*" (Isaiah 49:24; Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21-22; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:7-11; Ephesians 2:1-4).

3. When he comes again to make all things new, the Lord Jesus will cast Satan out of this world into the lake of fire, where he shall have no more power (Revelation 20:10).

There is a day coming when Christ will come again in his glory, when the total and everlasting destruction of Satan's kingdom will take place. In that day we who are one with Christ will triumph over the prince of darkness in complete victory (Romans 16:20). There is no such thing as "a devil's hell." Hell belongs to God. It is his torture chamber, in which he will forever torment the devil and all who have followed him to destruction.

Now, look at verse 23, and observe this fact. – There is among men in this world...

## A Great Division

Those who are not with Christ are against him. There is no middle ground. — "*He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*" The Lord Jesus here shows us the impossibility of neutrality with regard to him, his gospel, and his kingdom. Multitudes try to straddle the fence, halting between two opinions, not wishing to deny Christ altogether, and not wishing to serve him altogether, not wanting to engage in open rebellion to the Son of God, but not wanting to engage in the cause of Christ. Such neutrality is impossible.

There are, with regard to spiritual things, only two camps; there are only two sides. Either we are with Christ, committed to him and his cause, or we are against Christ, committed to the

world, the flesh, and the devil. We cannot serve both God and mammon. If we do not serve Christ, we oppose him. There is no middle ground. In a word, the gospel of Christ demands decisiveness (Joshua 24:15). John Gill wrote...

“Since there is such an open war proclaimed and carried on between Christ and the devil, none ought to be neutral; whoever is not on the side of Christ, is reckoned as an enemy; and whoever is not concerned by prayer or preaching, or other means to gather souls to his word and ordinances, and to his church, and to himself, is deemed by him a scatterer of them.”

Next, in verses 24-26 our Lord gives us a warning concerning spurious conversions. Here is...

## *A Great Deception*

That which is Satan’s greatest weapon of defense against Christ and the gospel of his grace, that by which he most securely keeps his palace is a refuge of lies.

“When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

The unclean spirit goes out of his own free will. – He is not cast out, but goes out. He walks through dry, desert places seeking rest, but finds none. He returns to his house from which he came out. When he returns, he finds his house in wonderful condition. It was swept, not washed, but swept. It was garnished, not made new, but garnished. When he returns, he brings seven spirits more wicked than himself. Then the last state of that man is worse than the first. When the sinner takes for himself a refuge of lies, seeks to hide from God in false religion, he is worse off than a person with no religion (Isaiah 28:14-20). But even here,

the soul is not beyond the reach of omnipotent grace (Isaiah 28:16, 20; Hosea 4:17; 11:8-9; 13:4, 9, 12, 14).

O Lord Jesus, Great Deliverer, O Blessed Son of God, Almighty Savior, if you are passing by, traveling in the greatness of your strength, come and show your mighty prowess. Turn aside, O Heavenly Samson, and rend the lion in this vineyard. If you have dipped your robes in the blood of your foes, come dye them all again with the blood of my cruel sins! If you have trodden the wine press of Jehovah's wrath, and crushed your enemies, here is another of the accursed crew, come and drag him out and crush him! Here is an Agag in my heart, come and hew him in pieces! Here is a Dagon in my spirit, break, O break, his head and set me free from my old state of sin! Deliver me from my fierce enemy, and unto you alone shall be the praise, forever and ever. Amen.

# Chapter 73

## Looking for a Sign

Luke 11:27-32

“And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it. And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here” (Luke 11:27-32).

Are you looking for a sign? Are you waiting for the Lord to show you a sign? We live in an age of such religious deception and perversity that men and women are taught from the pulpits to do so. Such a generation is described by the Son of God in this passage of Holy Scripture as a wicked, perverse and adulterous generation.

Any faith that is based upon a sign, the observation of a miracle, the proof of logic, a feeling of something spiritual, an

experience, or anything else other than the revelation of God in Holy Scripture is a false faith. True, God-given, saving faith has for its foundation the Word of God alone.

That is the message of the text before us. *“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”* May God give us grace to believe him, not our experiences! – Him, not our feelings! – Him, not our reason! – Him, not signs and wonders!

## The Blessedness of Faith

The greatest blessing God can bestow upon anyone in this world is the gift of faith in Christ. — *“And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it”* (vv. 27-28).

The Lord Jesus had just cast out a devil, by the power of his omnipotent grace, causing a dumb man to speak. After performing this great miracle, he was accused by the “religious right,” the “moral majority”, of performing his work by the power of Satan, of being in league with the devil, maybe of even being the devil himself.

Then, the Son of God explained publicly who he is (the King of Glory), by what power he works (the Finger of God), the result of his work (Satan cast out) and, at the same time, exposed the hypocrisy of those whited sepulchers who were indeed the servants of Satan.

Hearing these things, observing the power of his grace, perhaps rejoicing in the embarrassment of the Pharisees, perhaps remembering what the Son of God had done for her by his grace, there was a woman in the crowd whose adoration of Christ, because of her remembrance of his mercy, caused her to break the rules of politeness. She cried out, — *“Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked!”*

These words were not a pronouncement of praise and veneration of Mary. It is sad that such a statement as that must be

made; but the Mariolatry of Rome is so profuse that often the mother of Jesus is elevated in the minds of people above other women to a position of kinship to divinity. It is utter idolatry to pray to Mary! Mary is not God; and she certainly is not, as the papists chant, “the mother of God!”

This was not a word of praise to Mary. Rather it was a figure of speech, by which this woman expressed adulation and praise for the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not use the same words, but we often praise someone in the same way. – “That child is an honor to his parents.” – “That child speaks well of his parents.” – “That child must make his parents very proud.”

Mary was indeed a blessed woman. Both the angel Gabriel and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, spoke of her blessedness (Luke 1:28, 42). I do not doubt for a moment that sister Mary was a woman of remarkable character, exemplary faith and behavior, and steadfast virtue. I am certain that she was such a woman.

However, Mary’s blessedness was the blessedness of a sinner saved by grace, nothing less, and nothing more. Her blessedness did not arise so much from the fact that the Son of God was in her womb, but from the fact that he was in her heart. Mary was highly favored of God as the object of his grace, chosen, redeemed, called, sanctified and accepted in Christ, just like us. She worshipped the baby in her belly as God her Savior in her heart. After she had given birth to the Lord Jesus, to our Savior’s humanity, she came to the temple with the sacrifice of the law, because of her uncleanness, because she was a sinner who needed the blood atonement of Christ just like us (Luke 2:24; Leviticus 12:6-8).

When the Savior heard this woman’s praise, he immediately knew what horrid blasphemy would soon come to be attached to those words by the deceivers in Rome. So he immediately gives us a word of instruction, declaring, — *“Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”*

True blessedness is the blessedness of grace bestowed upon all who are born of God. How great are the privileges of grace

bestowed upon sinners in this world who hear the Word of God and keep it! It is a great privilege indeed to hear the Word of God faithfully preached. But our Savior is not talking about the mere outward hearing of the gospel. That will prove an everlasting curse, unless there is, with the hearing of the Word, the accompaniment of saving grace causing us to hear the Word and keep it, to hear it with faith and understanding, and to guard it, prize it and keep it as the Word of God. All to whom God grants the gift of faith in his Son are truly blessed of God.

- Blessed with all the Blessings of Grace (Ephesians 1:3).
- Blessed with all the Blessings of Providence (Romans 8:28).
- Blessed with all the Blessings of Heavenly Glory (Ephesians 1:11).

## The Demand of Unbelief

Unbelief always demands something more than the Word of God. — *“And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.”* Matthew tells us that our Lord Jesus also declared, *“An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign”* (Matthew 12:39).

Without question, our Lord was speaking specifically of the generation in which he then walked in this world. It was a distinctly evil and adulterous generation, a generation much like our own. Like the day in which we live, those were days of indescribable, horrid evil. Philosophical, political, moral and spiritual evil was seen everywhere (Romans 1:18-32).

But the emphasis, both here and in Matthew’s account, appears to be upon the evil of those who seek after a sign as a basis for believing God. The people gathered in thick crowds to hear the Son of God preach. But they were a people who demanded a sign, something they could see, something they

could feel, something they could understand, something they could prove, as the basis of faith. – They professed that they would believe God, if the Lord God would simply prove himself in the court of carnal reason and experience. – They wanted evidences for faith. But faith that is based upon evidence is not faith.

The God of glory will never bow to you and me. We must bow to him. He condescends in great grace to save sinners. But he will never stoop to be judged by us! If we would be saved, we must bow to him, believing him (1 Corinthians 1:17-31).

## The Sign of Jonah

The only sign upon which faith can rest is the accomplishment of redemption proclaimed and revealed in the gospel. — *“For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation”* (v. 30). The sign of Jonah was both a declaration of grace and a prophecy of redemption accomplished. Jonah declared, *“Salvation is of the LORD!”* Jonah’s being raised to life again after three days in the belly of the whale was a prophetic picture of our redemption by Christ’s death and resurrection as our Substitute.

As Jonah was cast into the sea and swallowed by the whale to appease the storm of judgment, another man, the God-man, Christ Jesus, was swallowed up in the wrath of God. When wrath was turned away, that man, our Substitute, arose from the belly of hell, after three days in the heart of the earth. And as Jonah went and preached to the men of Nineveh, that risen man, Christ the Lord, proclaimed grace to sinners deserving the wrath of God.

## The Judgment of God

Be sure you understand our Lord’s doctrine in verses 31-32. — Divine justice will make everything that should have been a means of blessedness and salvation here an instrument of torment in hell.

“The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon *is here*. The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is here*” (vv. 31-32).

The Queen of Sheba, when she heard report of Solomon’s riches, greatness, wisdom and glory, traveled many miles at great expense to meet that great man, on the basis of nothing but the word of men. And Solomon was only a sinful man. – “*Behold, a greater than Solomon is here!*” The men of Nineveh, when they heard the message of God by the lips of Jonah, a prophet who was at best less than desirable, repented. – “*Behold, a greater than Jonah is here!*” You have heard and read the Word of God, the gospel of his grace. Will that be to you a blessing, or a curse? If the Lord God gives you faith in his dear Son, the Word that you have heard and read will be an everlasting blessing of God’s grace to you. But if you refuse to trust Christ, that same word shall rise up in judgment against you and forever torment your soul in hell (2 Corinthians 2:14-16; 1 John 5:1-14).

# Chapter 74

## Light or Darkness?

Luke 11:33-36)

“No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth *it* in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when *thine eye* is evil, thy body also *is* full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore *be* full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light” (Luke 11:33-36).

Our Master often used this symbolism of light (a candle on a candlestick) for various purposes (Matthew 5:15; Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16). His intention here is clearly revealed by the context. He is talking about himself. He is declaring that he (the Light of the World) had stood before these men as a bright, shining light. His works, his claims, his ministry were open, public and unmistakably clear. “*These things were not done in a corner.*”

He who is greater, a greater light and witness, than both Jonah and Solomon is the Light which no man lighted. He is indeed the Light! Our Lord is here declaring that man’s unbelief and rebellion is inexcusable. He is continuing with the same line of thought and doctrine as he gave in verses 29-32. The doctrine of our text is plain. — Light has come into the world, but because men love darkness rather than light, they despise light and choose darkness.

“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the

world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” (John 3:19-21)

Christ is the Light. Some, seeing the Light, are dazzled by it. One, seeing something of our Lord’s brightness, cried, “*Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.*” The malicious Pharisees and religionists saw nothing of the Light. They blatantly imputed the Master’s works of mercy to the Devil. Many profess to see some light in him, but see so little that they ask for a sign from heaven to make the light more clear!

Our Lord’s constant answer in his day was the same as it is in ours. The Light just keeps on shining, unaffected by the darkness that cannot see. Brilliantly that Light shined in Palestine; it shines more brilliantly today. The Light is meant to be seen. Therefore the Lord God has put the Light of the World upon a lamp stand and lifted him up. The Light was lifted up by John the Baptist. The Light was lifted up upon the Cross. The Light was lifted up in the Lord’s resurrection. The Light has been lifted up in our Savior’s ascension and exaltation as Lord and King. And the Light is lifted up in the preaching of the gospel.

In the Old Testament, under the types and shadows of the law, the Light was, as it were, hidden under a bushel and not yet lit. Today, the Light shines in all the world, to men and women of every race, kindred, tribe and tongue. The Light now shines. If you do not see, it is no fault of the Light, but of your own blindness (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

Light is essential to spiritual life. Ignorance is not the mother of faith, but of superstition. Faith is the gift of God; but it is a gift given by the light and knowledge of the gospel. If the Light of God does not shine in our soul, the life of God is not there. We must have light, or we have no life. If the Sun of Righteousness does not shine to illuminate our dark hearts, darkness and death yet prevail. We must have light within us, or the Light shining outside us will be of no benefit to our souls (Ephesians 1:15-20).

## The Entrance of Light

*“The light of the body is the eye.”* — Light enters the body through the eye. But how does light enter the soul? If we have no eyes to see, we cannot see, no matter how brightly the sun shines around us.

Our problem is not that there is no light. Our problem is that we have no eyes. The natural man is totally blind spiritually. Therefore, he cannot see. But his condition is far worse even than that. He does not want to see the Light. By nature, we all love darkness rather than light. — *“The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness”* (v. 34).

The eye of the soul is the mind, the understanding, the conscience, the heart. When the eye is clear, single, unclouded, then the whole body is full of light. When the eyes of our souls are opened and enlightened by the Spirit of God into the truths of the Gospel, when there is nothing clouding our vision of the glory of Christ in the gospel, the whole soul is filled with light, joy, comfort and peace.

But when the eye is evil, the whole body is full of darkness. When a person has cataracts covering his eyes, he cannot see. If he has glaucoma, once it is full blown, he is engulfed in darkness. Spiritually, when the understanding is darkened through the blindness and ignorance there is in all men, with respect to the gospel, all the powers and faculties of the soul are engulfed in darkness, and man gropes about in gross darkness.

The eyes of men are blinded by many things. The darkness of our fallen, depraved nature blinds every man. The cataracts, the blinding scales of religious tradition and heresy, blind people. The glaucoma, the haziness, of self-righteousness blinds multitudes. The myopia, the shortsightedness, of materialism and worldliness repays its worshippers with blindness.

Self-seeking, in every form, obscures the light of the soul. The glitter of gold blinds the eye. How could Judas see the

beauty and glory of Christ when he saw greater value in the thirty pieces of silver? How can a man set his heart upon heaven and eternity when his eye is fixed on material things?

Of all antichrists, self is the hardest to kill. Pride, ambition, the desire for honor and respect, the craving of man's approval and applause blind the eye to the light of heaven. Oh, how we crave the approval of men! I am convinced that nothing makes a man more resistant to the doctrine gospel of Christ than the fear that others will not approve. This proud antichrist, self, is never so strong, so vigorous, so unconquerable as in the proud desire human flesh has for the glory of salvation that belongs to God alone. Man, whose god is his belly, is blinded by his god!

A single eye, a clear understanding is God's gift! A single eye comes from having your eye fixed upon a single Object — Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). If you see Christ, if you see the glory of God in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, then "*blessed are your eyes for they see!*" Then your whole body is full of light.

## Light Made Darkness

Our Lord says, "*When thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness.*" The evil eye here is not talking about the evil eye of witchcraft, but the understanding that is perverted, so perverted that light is turned into darkness. In the natural world light can never become darkness; but in spiritual matters it often does. "*When thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.*"

Take heed to the gospel and the ministry of the gospel, take heed, lest you despise the light and it become darkness to your soul. Light despised will become darkness; and there is no blindness like judicial blindness. From such there is no recovery. Perhaps you are thinking, "How can the light that is in a person become darkness?" Let me show you. Men turn light into darkness when...

- They turn the grace of God into lasciviousness.
- They pervert the ordinances of the gospel into sacraments.
- They make God’s holy law a means of holiness.
- They make freedom from the law a license to sin.
- They make the graces of the Spirit conditions of grace.
- They make the doctrine of Christ salvation.
- They make divine sovereignty an excuse for irresponsibility.
- They make character and conduct meaningless.
- They make character and conduct a basis of hope and assurance.

*“Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness!”*

## Light Shines

What does light do? I cannot think of anything light does except this: — Light shines. That is what we see in verse 36. — *“If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.”*

When light comes, it shines. If the eye is right, if it is single and clear, there is no great work for it to do that it may get light. The light is shining. All the eye does is see it. When the sun is shining, if you want light, just open your eyes. You don’t need to rub your eyes. Just open them. You don’t need to exercise your eyes. Just open them. You don’t need to discipline your eyes. Just open them. You don’t need to get your eyes into the proper position to see. Just open them! You don’t need to adorn your eyes. Just open them!

When the eye is sound, it takes in light and takes pleasure in

the light. It conveys the image of things external to the mind within. If the Lord, in his great grace, has made your eye single, so that you desire only to know the truth, then, without toil or labor, you shall know the truth. The light enters when the window is open. And when the Light comes in, you know it. It is not possible to pass from darkness into light without knowing it, because the shining light dispels darkness, exposing all that is in us. That same shining light reveals that which is outside us. — God's salvation in Christ! And the light shining in us shines out of us to others. The darker the night the more radiant the light (1 John 1:5-7).

# Chapter 75

## Self-righteousness

Luke 11:37-54

“And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner. And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also? But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you. But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe the mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them. Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also. And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and

apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation. Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered. And as he said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him” (Luke 11:37-54).

I would rather stand before God guilty of any crime than stand before him in the Day of Judgment guilty of self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is man’s foolish, ignorant attempt to make himself righteous. — It is the hypocritical claim of men and women that they are good, righteous and holy. — It is that great noise of religion and piety, by which people try to silence the inward torments of a guilty conscience. — Self-righteousness is the religion of fools.

“*Ye fools!*” (v. 41) — That is exactly what our Lord called the Pharisees and Scribes of his day; and that is exactly what I call them today. It takes a little intelligence to be selfish; but it takes total ignorance to be self-righteous! The word our Lord uses for “*fools*” here is not the same word used in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:22). This is the word Paul used to describe those who denied the gospel in Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:36). It means “people without mind or understanding!” Truly, all who pretend to be righteous of themselves are totally without mind or understanding!

There is nothing in all the world so contemptible, so obnoxious, so hateful to our God as self-righteousness (Isaiah 65:2-5). — “*For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*”

(1 Corinthians 4:7) Yet, there is nothing more natural to us!

Our Lord Jesus was invited to have dinner with a Pharisee; and he accepted the invitation. While he was there, the Pharisees, the scribes and the lawyers, those who pretended to be righteous, gave him exactly the background upon which to show the character and folly of self-righteousness. That is the picture set before us in Luke 11:37-54.

## Traditions or the Word

Self-righteousness is always more concerned about the traditions of men than the Word of God. — “*The Pharisee marveled that He had not first washed before dinner*” (v. 38). These Pharisees of Christ’s day not only held the traditions of the elders about hand-washing, but in their superstitious zeal also bathed (washed – baptized) their bodies before eating a meal (Mark 7:3-4). Yes, the law of God required the ceremonial purification to which their tradition pointed; but by adding their traditions to the Word of God, they nullified the commandment of God.

Multitudes today follow this evil example of the Pharisees, setting religious traditions over the Word of God. Throughout the history of Christianity, men have held traditions superior to the Scriptures, even as they have pretended to be defending and protecting the Scriptures. Churches around the world have man written creeds and confessions, by which they determine what is to be believed and practiced, setting traditions above the Word of God. Denominational customs are rigidly followed, while the Book of God is ignored. Historical theology is made the basis of faith, rather than the revelation of God. Church covenants are made the rule by which church members are to be governed, rather than the Scriptures. Religious taboos are imposed upon people from one generation to another, taboos nowhere found in Holy Scripture, by which churches and preachers seek to control the lives of God’s saints. The creed of all Pharisees, the creed of self-righteous religion is “*touch not, taste not, handle not*” (Colossians 2:21).

In the heavenly truthful dignity of his character, our Master

purposefully ignored the Pharisees' traditions. We ought to follow his example. The sons of God are not to be in bondage to the traditions and customs of men! Those who are made free by Christ are free indeed!

Here is the Son of God, the embodiment of truth and holiness, standing before this Pharisee. Yet, this self-righteous hypocrite despised the Lord of Glory and judged him to be a sinner, because he did not conform to the petty custom of washing his hands at a public dinner!

## Outward or Inward

Self-righteous religionists are always more concerned about the outward form of godliness than heart faith and worship. — *“They make clean the outside of the cup, but the inward is full of ravening and wickedness”* (v. 39). They live for the approval and applause of men, not for the acceptance of God. Their religion is a religion men can see and measure. All hypocrites are men pleasers. They will make their hands clean, though their hearts are full of wickedness. They look upon the things which are seen. They profess to know God; but in works they deny him (Titus 1. 16). They deny that *“out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,”* that these are the things which defile a man (Matthew 15:19-20). They make a great show of godliness, but have no concern for God or man. Their only object is themselves. They have a form of godliness, but deny the power of it. That is to say, *“Though they practice religion and dutifully perform religious duties, they deny the gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation.”* They say their prayers, but know nothing of prayer. They go to church, but know nothing of worship. They pay their tithes, but know nothing of giving.

True religion, true godliness does not ignore or despise public worship and the observance of gospel ordinances. True believers delight in those things. But our religion is not an outward show. It is primarily inward and spiritual. It is primarily a heart matter.

## Spiritual Ignorance

Self-righteousness is always totally ignorant of all things spiritual.—“*Ye fools!*”—When it comes to spiritual matters, they have neither mind nor understanding.

I do not say they are not smart. They may be brilliant. I do not even say they are not orthodox. They may be thoroughly so. But they do not understand anything about themselves, God, or Christ, sin, righteousness, or salvation. They know neither the law of God nor the gospel of God. All they know is religious words, customs, traditions and facts. Being ignorant of their own hearts, they vainly imagine they are good. Being ignorant of God’s righteousness, they go about to establish their own righteousness (Romans 9:33-10:4). The self-righteous religionist foolishly convinces himself that God will look on his outward behavior and thereby be blinded to his heart!

Fallen man has no righteousness of his own. And he is totally ignorant of God’s righteousness. He is ignorant of God’s character of righteousness, God’s requirement of righteousness, and God’s accomplishment of righteousness in Christ. Being ignorant of both the righteousness of God and his own sinfulness, fallen man ever goes about to establish his own righteousness. Fallen man made an apron of fig leaves, by which he hoped to meet with God’s approval. His firstborn son followed the example and nature he had received from his fallen father. Cain offered God a bloodless sacrifice, which he had produced by the works of his own hands. But God despised it.

No one will ever trust Christ until he sees that he has no righteousness of his own and that it is utterly impossible for him to produce any righteous work acceptable to God. Yet, fallen, ignorant, sinful men and women continue the vain, futile work of trying to establish their own righteousness. They take bricks from the kiln of their corrupt hearts and slime of their defiled hands for mortar, and try to build a tower of Babel that will bring them to heaven. By works of legal obedience, moral reformation, personal sacrifice, self-denial, devotion, sacramentalism, penitence and religious zeal, foolish man hopes to establish

righteousness for himself. But when he has done the very best he can do and offers it up to God, giving God his righteousness is like throwing a vile, discarded, loathsome menstruous cloth in the face of the triune God (Isaiah 64:6)!

God will not have it. God requires perfect obedience. He cannot and will not accept anything less than perfection, both inward and outward (Galatians 3:10). Fallen man cannot produce righteousness, because his heart is evil (Matthew 15:19). A corrupt fountain cannot bring forth pure water. Everything man does is defiled, because his motives are defiled. No man can make atonement for his sin (Hebrews 10:11). Even if man could cleanse his heart and begin to do righteousness, he could never be accepted with God on that basis, because he still bears the guilt of sin and must be punished.

The Lord Jesus declares, “*Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:20). We must have perfect righteousness, even the righteousness of God that is in Christ Jesus. That righteousness was obtained for chosen sinners by the faith of Jesus Christ, and is bestowed freely upon all who believe on the Son of God (Romans 3:22). It cannot be earned, merited, or gained by the works of men.

## Trifles Cherished

Self-righteous religionists are always sticklers for trifles, and neglects that which is indispensable. Self-righteous men and women attempt to make atonement for their sins, mistakes, faults and errors by doing good works that men applaud.

“*Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also? But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you. But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*” (vv. 40-42).

They give alms and feel very good about their great philanthropy. Verse 41 is not a commendation, but an accusation. Our Lord is saying, “You fools! You wash your cups and platters, fill them by devouring widows’ houses, and then give alms of such things as you have, and ignorantly imagine that you are holy and clean before God!”

They pay tithes (on the gross, not the net!) while ignoring both the justice of God and the love of God. The self-righteous do not understand that God truly is just and he will only deal with men upon the grounds of justice. The self-righteous love themselves and hate both God and their neighbors, while pretending to love them. In religious matters they are scrupulously orthodox and equally malicious! — They will argue vehemently for the rules of church order and discipline and ignore the gospel! — They will split hairs about polity and pass over the law of the spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus! — They will split churches and start new denominations over the singing of psalms or hymns, and never give a thought about brotherly love! — After hearing a sermon on Christ’s getting a Bride from among sinners, they want to discuss where Cain got his bride!

## Recognition and Praise

Self-righteousness loves the recognition and praise of men. — “*Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets*” (v. 43). The hypocrite is religious, but only so far as it will help to honor himself and minister to his vanity. He has no thought of adorning the doctrine of God our Savior; but he seeks to be adorned by the doctrine. If he holds office in the church, it is that it may add to his dignity. He may seldom be out of his place in the house of prayer, but his god is his belly. He will be very zealous in religion if he can gain the flattery of others.

Someone said, “The hypocrite is like a glow-worm; it seems to have both light and heat, but when you touch it, it has neither.”

## Covering for Corruption

Self-righteousness is always but hypocritical. It is nothing but a covering for inward corruption. Self-righteousness is really a manifestation of self-contempt. The loud noise of self-righteousness is designed to silence the turmoil in a man's guilty soul. — *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them”* (v. 44).

We seldom think of the foulness and rottenness inside the graves and tombs when we walk through a cemetery; but those graves and tombs are *“within, full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness.”* A sow that is washed is still only a washed sow. A hypocrite may manage by his white-washing to give no offence to his fellow-man; but God looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16. 7). Be not deceived, God is not mocked; the hidden man of the heart is naked and bare before the eyes of the Lord (Psalm 7:9). The hypocrite lives for that which is *“highly esteemed among men,”* but that which is highly esteemed among men is *“an abomination in the sight of God”* (Luke 16. 15).

## Offended by Christ

Self-righteousness is always offended by Christ. — *Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also”* (v. 45). The cross is always an offence to self-righteous men, because Christ is always an offence to them. The self-righteous are offended by everything our Master taught. Everything revealed in the gospel reproaches them (Divine Sovereignty — Total Depravity — Unconditional Election — Limited Atonement — Irresistible Grace — Perseverance of the Saints — Faith in a Substitute — Free Justification — Imputed Righteousness — Knowledge by Revelation).

## Imposed Laws

Self-righteousness always imposes upon others laws and rules that it excuses in itself. — “*And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers*” (v. 46). Self-righteous work-mongers raise a great ruckus about sabbath keeping, throw people out of church for going to a restaurant on Sunday, or watching a football game on Sunday. Yet, not one of those who pretend to live by Old Testament, Jewish law observes the very things they impose on others. They only pretend to keep the law.

## Persecution

Self-righteousness is the mother of persecution. Self-righteous religionists build monuments to dead prophets, while honoring the men who killed them and are themselves persecutors of living prophets.

“Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation” (vv. 47-51).

## Hinders Faith

Self-righteousness keeps sinners from entering the kingdom of God. — “*Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key*

*of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered”* (v. 52). While practicing religion, observing religious customs, defending creeds and establishing churches, mission boards, denominations, Bible Colleges and Seminaries, the religious hypocrites of this world take away Christ the key of knowledge. They refuse to enter the Strait Gate, Christ Jesus. And they stand in the way, blocking the Door, lest others enter in into life everlasting.

### Always Deceitful

Self-righteousness is always deceitful, conniving, and underhanded, never open and above board. — *“And as he said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him”* (vv. 53-54).

Once, while preaching near Anchorage, Alaska, I saw a large sign hanging over the entrance to a bar. When I read it, I thought to myself, that ought to be hung over the doorway of every church building in the world. So that both upon entering and leaving, all would be compelled to read it. The sign read, — “If you wear your halo too tight, you give the rest of us a headache.”

# Chapter 76

## A Message for the Master's Friends

Luke 12:1-7

“In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:1-7).

We have in this portion of Luke's Gospel a message to the Master's friends. While the scribes and Pharisees were laying wait for him, seeking some pretentious ground for hurling vile accusations at him (11:54), as literally thousands of people crowded to hear him, the Lord Jesus turned to his disciples, those men and women who followed him, and particularly to those men whom he had chosen and sent out to preach the gospel, and gave

them the message contained in these verses. The message is simple, clear and forthright. I will give it to you in seven statements.

## 1. The Lord Jesus Christ was an exemplary preacher (v. 1).

This first lesson I take not from our Master's words so much as from his behavior. — *"In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy"* (v. 1).

Our Lord Jesus was constantly concerned for the welfare of his people. While the scribes and Pharisees were seeking his ruin, his heart and mind were occupied with his chosen. His every thought was focused on his disciples. He did nothing to defend or protect himself. He was concerned for his people.

What an example he is. I pray that he will make me such a preacher, a preacher and a pastor fully devoted to the welfare of God's people, serving the souls of men, with no thought of self-interest!

Now, watch the Master. There were, as I said, literally thousands of people gathered around him. What would he say? How would he speak? Here is God who is love incarnate, the only man who ever loved men perfectly. How will he speak? Surely every preacher will be wise to emulate him.

Our Lord began his message with a severe, public denunciation of the most powerful, influential religious leaders and the religion they represented. Unsparingly, unflinchingly, without partiality, he denounced the scribes and Pharisees as utter hypocrites. How different things might be today if gospel preachers everywhere would follow his example! Our Master was more concerned for the glory of God than the approval of men. He was more concerned for the welfare of men's souls than their applause. He was more concerned for his people than for his own

reputation, safety and comfort. Here's the second lesson:

## 2. We must constantly guard against hypocrisy (v. 1).

*“He began to say unto his disciples first of all”* — Notice that the Lord Jesus directed his message not to the Pharisees, nor to the multitude, but to his disciples. These were the men he had chosen to be the preachers of his Gospel. It was, therefore, needful that they (and we) be made aware of the pretentious devices and arts of the Scribes and Pharisees. He knew that we need to be warned and prepared for the devices of Satan and his messengers who come as wolves in sheep's clothing.

*“Before all things, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”* — This warning, he says, is to stand before us above all cautions, above all beacons, before all things. Ever beware of this leaven, which will ultimately ruin everything: — HYPOCRISY!

In doctrine and in conduct, the whole of the Pharisees' religion was nothing but an outward show of piety. The whole of their religion is outward, designed and practiced for man's approval. It is all appearance only.

Our Lord compares it to leaven. Though, perhaps, very small at first, it gradually increases and spreads itself. Like leaven, it lies hidden and covered, and is not easily discerned. Its agenda and influence and effects are not open and above board. But given time, it infects and corrupts the whole of men's principles and practices. Religion without Christ puffs and swells men with pride like nothing else. — Beware of every doctrine and religious practice that is obviously intended for show. — Beware of everything that seems pretentious. — Beware, above all else, of your own tendency to such things!

If we would avoid the danger of hypocrisy, the deadly plague of pretense, we must ever seek to be simple, sincere and open, honest with God, especially about ourselves (2 Corinthians 11:2-3).

3. There is a day coming when all things shall be revealed and made known (v. 2).

*"For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known."* — Our Lord repeated this fact so often that all who heard him must have thought it was a matter he intended for us to lay to heart (Matthew 10:26; Mark 4:22; Luke 8:17). *"There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known."* — What a warning this is for hypocrites! What a consolation it is for true believers! Both Job and the Apostle Paul considered it a matter of great joy that all things will be made manifest in that great day (Job 16:19; 1 Corinthians 4:3-4).

4. That which the Lord God has been pleased to reveal to us we must proclaim to the world (v. 3).

*"Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops."* — Has the Lord God revealed to us the gospel of his grace? Then let us proclaim it from the housetop.

"So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:15-17)

5. There are some people in this world whom the Son of God has made to be his friends (v. 4).

Look at the opening line of verse 4. — *"And I say unto you my friends."* Isn't that remarkable? Christ Jesus makes sinners his friends! He is the Friend of publicans and sinners. Rejoice! He is the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Give thanks! But

here is something else. He has made us his friends.

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." (John 15:14-15)

## 6. There is nothing so destructive to our faithfulness and usefulness as the fear of man (vv. 4-5).

"And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him."

The fear of man is bondage. The only cure there is for the fear of man is the fear of God. If we fear God, there is no reason to fear anyone else. Life and death are in his hands alone; and none can harm us, except by the will and consent of our heavenly Father.

Learn this, too. — Hell and everlasting judgment and wrath are real.

## 7. God's elect have nothing to fear (vv. 6-7).

"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows."

Nothing whatever, whether great or small, can happen to one of God's elect, without God's decree and direction.

The providential government of our great God over everything in this world is a truth which is clearly revealed and constantly taught in the Word of God. Just as the telescope and microscope show us that there is order and design in all the works of God's hand, from the greatest planet down to the least insect,

so the Book of God teaches us that there is an infinite wisdom, divine order, and gracious design in all the events of our daily lives. There is no such thing as "chance," "luck," or "accident" in God's creation or in our journey through this world. All is arranged and appointed by God, our heavenly Father. And all things "*work together*" for our good (Romans 8:28; 11:33-36).

Let us seek to have an abiding sense of God's hand in all our affairs. Our Father's hand measures out our daily portion. All our steps are ordered by him who loves us with an everlasting love. Confidence in God's wise and good providence is a mighty antidote against murmuring and discontent. In the day of trial and disappointment, as in the day of joy and happiness, all is right and all is well done. When we are laid on the bed of sickness, there is a "needs be" for it. Else, it would not come to pass. Because it comes to pass, the very fact that it comes to pass should assure us that it is for our souls' advantage. Let us bow and be still, and bear all things patiently. Ours is "*an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure*" (2 Samuel 23:5). That which pleases our God ought to please us. Truly, "*He hath done all things well!*" And he will yet do all things well.

# Chapter 77

## Two Warnings and a Promise

### Luke 12:8-12

“Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven. And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and *unto* magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say” (Luke 12:8-12).

The passage we have read contains some “*things hard to be understood.*” The principle thing that is dealt with in this text is “*the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.*” This is a subject about which it must be acknowledged little is known. The best and fullest explanations of it are, in my opinion, far from being exhaustive and satisfactory. And I have no delusions about being able to fathom the depths of this subject. I will say no more about it than I am confident of as a matter of divine revelation and no less.

We must never be surprised to find things in the Bible that are simply beyond the reach of our minds. If it had no deep places here and there, which no man is capable of understanding, much less explaining, it would not be the Word of the infinite God. However, rather than stumbling and falling over the things we cannot understand, we ought to give thanks to God for those

revelations of wisdom and grace, which even the simplest minds are able to grasp. When we find things written in the Word of God that we do not understand, or that appear to our puny brains to be inconsistent with matters of clear revelation, let us reverently bow to the Scriptures, knowing that God is true, praying and waiting for clearer understanding that only God the Holy Spirit can give. Let us never speculate about divine truth, or offer opinions about things beyond our comprehension.

## Confessing Christ and Denying Him

In verses 8 and 9 our Lord warns us about denying him, teaching us that true faith confesses him before men and will not deny him.

“Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.”

If you would be saved, you must come to Christ (Matthew 11:28-30). There is no salvation without coming to the Lord Jesus. I am often asked, “How do I come to Christ?” Come to Christ any way you can, but come. This coming to Christ is an act of faith. If you come to Christ in saving faith, you must do so personally. I wish that I could believe God for my family; but a father cannot trust Christ for his children. Each must trust the Son of God personally. Unless a person in his own heart believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he will perish.

If you come to Christ, you must come sincerely. You must not only be persuaded that Christ is the Way, but in your heart you must lovingly and sincerely agree with God’s terms of salvation. He says, “*My son, give me thine heart*” (Proverbs 23:26). It is the heart or nothing in this heavenly marriage.

This matter of faith in Christ, coming to Christ, is a rational, reasonable thing. All who come to Christ do so rationally, in knowledge and understanding. Faith is not a leap in the dark, but a reasonable, rational, knowledgeable trust. I know what Christ

saved me from. He has saved me from sin's curse and condemnation. I know who saved me — the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man. I know how he saved me. He saved me by grace alone, through the merits of his perfect obedience and precious blood. And I know why he saved me. He did so “*according to the good pleasure of His own will*” (grace, grace, and more grace).

I know this, too: — If you come to Christ, you will never quit coming to him. Believers are sinners who are ever coming to Christ, seeking him, trusting him, and worshipping him (1 Peter 2:1-4; Colossians 2:6). The gift of faith is a permanent gift of grace; and those who come to Christ come permanently, with no intention of ever leaving him; and, by his grace, with no possibility of ever being forsaken by him.

Having come to Christ, we confess him (Romans 10:9-13). We confess our Savior before God, the Church, and the world in believer's baptism (Romans 6:1-6); and we confess him before men in daily conversation, bearing witness to others of his marvelous, free, saving grace. If we deny Christ before men in this world, he will deny us before the angels of God in the world to come.

When our Savior said, “*he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God,*” was not talking about an act of denying him, as Peter did. Such a horrid thing a true believer may do. Our Lord is here talking about a person who denies Christ and goes on denying him, a person who persists in denying him (2 Timothy 2:12; 1 John 2:23).

Let us ever take care that we confess Christ before men. I am not talking about button-holing people, making a lot of religious noise, or obnoxiously badgering people with our religion. However, as God gives you opportunity, or in his providence constrains it, do not allow anyone or anything to make you ashamed of Christ. Confess him.

I do not go around talking to people about my wife everywhere I go; but I never miss an opportunity to talk about her. It is not a forced thing, but very natural. I love her; and it is very natural to talk about someone you love. Should I ever be in a

place where someone speaks ill of her, I would be ashamed if I did not speak boldly of her honor. If I failed to do so, she and all who observed such silence would have every reason to be suspicious of my professed love for her.

Ever confess Christ before men. Never be ashamed of him, the gospel of his grace, and the goodness and mercy you experience at his hands. If we deny him, he will deny us. In the world to come we will reap the consequences of such cowardice and hypocrisy. In the Day of Judgment he will refuse to own us; he will refuse to plead for us; and he will refuse to be an Advocate for us.

## The Unpardonable Sin

In verse 10 our Lord warns us of that sin which shall not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come. — *“And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.”*

I will say no more about this than is obvious; but I will say no less. There is such a thing as the unpardonable sin. Many who spoke against the Son of man while he was upon the earth, not knowing who he is, were later converted and forgiven; but those who blaspheme against the Holy Ghost are forever damned (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28; 1 John 5:16).

We must not make more of this warning than our Lord does. What is this unpardonable sin, this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that shall never be forgiven? It is not difficult to show from the Scriptures what this sin is not. The difficulty is showing clearly what it is.

Our Savior clearly declares the free, full, absolute, and everlasting forgiveness of all sin to all believers. — *“All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.”* — *“If we confess our sins,”* no matter what they are, no matter how vile they are, no matter how many they are, no matter how old or how new they are, the Lord God *“is faithful and just to forgive us our*

sins,” all of them, completely, and forever, “*and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). — “*The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7).

Yet, the Son of God does speak about one particular sin that is unpardonable. It is called “*the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.*” What is “*the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost?*” “*The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*” does not involve sins of ignorance. The distinction drawn between “*speaking against the Son of man*” and “*speaking against (blaspheming) the Holy Ghost*” must not be overlooked. The sin against Christ as the Son of man was committed out of ignorance by those who did not know that he is the Messiah. Therefore, they did not receive him, believe him, and obey him, but opposed, persecuted, and even crucified him. But they did it ignorantly (1 Corinthians 2:8), as Saul of Tarsus did (1 Timothy 1:13).

This sin and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which our Savior declares is unpardonable, is committed by men and women who willfully persist in unbelief and obstinate impenitence, deliberately rejecting the counsel of God against themselves, and are therefore given up to a reprobate mind. J.C. Ryle accurately describes it as, “The union of the clearest head-knowledge of the Gospel with deliberate rejection of it, and deliberate choice of sin and the world.”

John Gill wrote, “It is a despiteful usage of the Spirit of grace, an opposing, contradicting, and denying of the operations wrought, or the doctrines revealed by him, against a man’s own light and conscience, out of a willful and obstinate malice, on purpose to lessen the glory of God, and gratify his own lusts. Such was the sin of the Scribes and Pharisees; who, though they knew the miracles of Christ were wrought by the Spirit of God, yet maliciously and obstinately imputed them to the devil, with a view to obscure the glory of Christ, and indulge their own wicked passions.”

This unpardonable sin is the willful, deliberate rejection of Christ by one who is fully convinced that he is the Son of God and the only Savior of sinners. It is a deliberate refusal to bow to him as Lord. It is choosing to save your life, rather than lose it to

the dominion of the Son of God. It is nothing less than running over top of the Son of God to get to hell!

Those who are troubled with the fear that they may have committed this unpardonable sin, most assuredly have not done so! The one thing that always characterizes those people described in the Scriptures as reprobate is a callousness and hardness that is the result of a seared conscience. When God gives a man up in reprobation, that man is no longer concerned for the glory of God, the knowledge of Christ, and the things of God.

Lot's wife, Pharaoh, King Saul, Ahab, and Judas Iscariot stand out as beacons to warn all. Each of them had crystal clear knowledge. Yet, each of them deliberately rejected Christ. They had light in their heads, but darkness in their hearts. Each of them today is in hell, suffering the wrath of God. Beware of despising the light God has given you. Do you know the truth? Then walk in the truth. Walk in the light God has given you. That is the only safeguard against the unpardonable sin.

In the context in which this and our Lord's other warnings about it are given, this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit appears to be that which was the preeminent crime of the Pharisees. It is the willful, persistent rejection of the gospel, the willful, persistent hardening of the heart against the claims of Christ in the gospel (2 Corinthians 2:14-16; (Proverbs 1:23-33; 29:1).

No doubt, some who read these lines will ask themselves, with terror in their souls, "Have I committed this unpardonable sin? Have I committed this blasphemy against the Holy Ghost?" To you, I say again, the sin here described is a sin accompanied by utter deadness, hardness, and insensibility of heart. The person whose sin shall never be forgiven him is precisely the person who will not seek to have his sins forgiven. That is the very essence of his condemnation. God has left him alone! He is "*twice dead!*" Sin hardened and gospel hardened, his conscience is seared as with a hot iron (1 Timothy 4:2). Do not be so foolish as to trifle with such things. Come to Christ now. Trust him now. Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart!

## God's Promise

In verses 11 and 12 our Lord Jesus promises grace to help in time of need.

“And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and *unto* magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”

Whatever your trial may be, my brother, whatever your difficulty, my sister, as surely as God is on his throne, he who brings you into the trial will bring you through the trial; and he will do it in such a way that it will be obvious that he did it. He will give you what you need, when you need it, enabling you to persevere, enabling you to serve him, enabling you to honor him. — *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”*

# Chapter 78

## The Parable of the Rich Fool

Luke 12:13-21

“And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:13-21).

We have before us the parable of the rich fool. It sets before us a striking example of man’s readiness to mix wealth and godliness, as though the two were inseparable. We are told that a certain hearer of our Lord asked him to assist him about his temporal affairs.

Here is a man who wanted what God had given to his brother (v. 13). — “*Master,*” he said, “*speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.*” How little this he knew of the

Lord Jesus, or of his business in this world! He probably had some vague idea that the Lord Jesus was going to set up a kingdom in this world, and would reign upon earth as a mere earthly monarch. He certainly regarded him as a rabbi, a respected religious teacher. Therefore, he sought the Master's help in securing an earthly inheritance. He tried to get the Son of God to cater to his covetousness. He should have set his heart on the world to come; but his heart was consumed with greed for this present, perishing world and its wealth. When David envied the prosperity of the wicked, his very soul was horrified by his covetousness (Psalm 73).

How many there are just like this man! Multitudes incessantly plan and scheme about the things of time, even under the very sound of things eternal! The natural heart of man is always the same. Even the preaching of Christ did not arrest the attention of all his hearers. Those who preach the gospel of Christ in the present day must never be surprised to see those for whose souls they labor consumed with worldliness, just as this poor man was

Here is a man who tried to get Jehovah's righteousness Servant involved in the affairs of state (v. 14). — "*And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?*" It would be a good thing if every gospel preacher would imitate our Master's conduct in this. Let us walk in his steps. The less preachers have to do with secular things, the better. That applies most particularly to political and civil matters. The Gospel preacher has no business involving himself in such drivel! When the preacher of the Gospel undertakes any work except the preaching of the Gospel, it is the work of the Gospel that suffers. God's servants must be men of one thing! Let us confine ourselves exclusively to that one thing! "*Give thyself wholly to these things!*" Like Paul, let us be "separated unto the Gospel!"

Here is a man who was very covetous. — He looked upon all he possessed as his own. He thought upon his treasure. It was the consuming thought of his heart. He looked upon his wealth as the fruit of his labor. He bestowed his goods to his barns, — a hole in the ground!

“And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods” (vv. 15-18).

In response to this man’s request, the Lord Jesus pronounced a very solemn warning against covetousness. — “*He said unto them, take heed and beware of covetousness.*” I am sure I am safe in saying that there is no evil to which our hearts are more prone than covetousness. It was covetousness that to cast down the angels who fell. They were not content with their first estate. They coveted something better. It was covetousness that drove Adam and Eve out of the garden and brought death into the world. Our first parents were not satisfied with the things God gave them in Eden. They coveted, and so they fell. It is covetousness that, ever since the fall, has been the cause of misery and unhappiness in this world. Wars, quarrels, strifes, divisions, envyings, disputes, jealousies, hatreds of all sorts, both public and private, may nearly all be traced to this foul fountain.

Let us hear the Master’s warning. Let us seek wisdom and grace to be content with such things as we have. Strive to learn the lesson that Paul learned, when he wrote, “*I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content.*” (Philippians 4:11.) Pray for a thorough confidence in God’s wise and good providence over all our earthly affairs, trusting his perfect wisdom in all his arrangements concerning us. If we have little, it would be not good for us to have much.

If that which we have is taken away, there is a needs be. Happy is the man or woman who is persuaded that whatever is best, and has ceased from vainly wishing for more. That person and that person alone is “*content with such things as he has.*” (Hebrews 13:5.)

Idolatry comes in many packages and wears many names, but

none is more deceitful, dangerous, and destructive than covetousness. How often the Word of God warns us to “*beware of covetousness*” (Colossians 3:2-5; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Timothy 6:10-11).

Covetousness is an ardent desire for the things of this world, an undue affection for and attachment to the riches, pleasures, and comforts of this world. Some covet the world’s money, others its applause. Some covet the world’s fame, others its’ comforts. Some covet the world’s honor, others its’ pleasures. But all covetousness is idolatry.

What fools they are who love and seek this world! We cannot be warned sufficiently of the danger of worldliness, that is of loving, seeking, and living for this world! “*The fashion of this world passeth away!*” Trying to hold to this world is like gripping sand. — The tighter you grip it, the faster it slips away. If you love and seek the things of this world, you cannot love and serve the Lord God (Matthew 6:24; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17).

Nothing is more likely to ruin our souls than “*covetousness, which is idolatry!*” Nothing will more effectually keep a person from faith in Christ than “*covetousness, which is idolatry*” (Luke 18:18-26). Nothing is more likely to turn the hearts of men away from Christ and the Gospel than “*covetousness, which is idolatry!*” “*The care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word*” (Matthew 13:22). May the Spirit of God inscribe these words upon our hearts: — “*Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth!*”

If we would avoid this snare of Satan, we must set our affection on things above and get our priorities in order. Seek grace to honor God in the use of those things with which you have been trusted. Use what God has given you for hospitality and the thoughtful care of others. Be generous. Out of our abundance, let us ever minister to those who are in need and generously provide for the preaching of the Gospel around the world.

True happiness comes not from wealth

Real peace you can never buy;  
The contentment that you long for  
Is in Christ who reigns on high.

Our Lord Jesus clearly displays the folly of worldliness. He gave this parable a rich man who was a fool<sup>14</sup>. His heart and mind was set on earthly things. He schemed and planned for his wealth, and ways to secure it. He acted as if he was master of his life, as if had but to say, “I will do a thing,” and it would be done.

Then the picture changes. God required the worldling’s soul, and asked, “*Whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?*” “Folly,” nothing less than “folly,” is the right word by which to describe the conduct of the man who thinks of nothing but his money. The man who “*lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God,*” is the man whom God declares to be a “*fool.*”

The character our Lord brings before us in this parable is very common. Multitudes in every age of the world have lived continually doing the very things that are here condemned. Multitudes are doing them at this very day. They are laying up treasure upon earth, and thinking of nothing but how to increase their riches. They continually add to their riches, as if they were to enjoy them forever, as if there was no death, no judgment, and no world to come.

These are the men who are called clever, and prudent, and wise! These are the men who are commended, and flattered, and held up to admiration! Truly, “*the Lord seeth not as man seeth!*” The Lord declares that the rich man who lives only for this world is a “*fool!*”

Nothing is more dangerous to the souls of men than riches. “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.*” He who is given

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14 The rich man talks of “my” barns, “my” fruits, “my” goods, with all the self-sufficiency and petty importance of one who knows no will but his own. and no master but his own selfishness. It should remind us of Nabal’s language, in 1 Samuel 25:11. Of him too it is written, “*Fool is his name, and folly is with him.*” (1 Samuel 25:25.)

wealth is in great danger. A very eminent, wealthy man, said on his deathbed, "Heaven is a place to which few kings and rich men come."

Even those wealthy men and women who are converted by the grace of God carry a great weight and run the race to heaven under great disadvantages. The possession of money has a hardening effect upon the conscience. We never know what we may do when we become rich. — "*The love of money is the root of all evil. While some have coveted after it, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*" (1 Timothy 6:10). Poverty has many disadvantages; but riches are dangerous.

**Here is a man who speaks to his soul.** — "*And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry*" (v. 19). Oh, how sad it is to read of a man speaking to his soul in such a way! Someone said, "If this man had only had the sense of a hog, what other thing could he have said?"

In spiritual matters, multitudes think themselves rich before God, rich in righteous deeds, rich in knowledge, and rich in grace, and say to themselves, "All is well," when nothing is well. Those who know God and experience his free grace in Christ know that they are poor and seek riches in heaven, seeking Christ and his righteousness. — "*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled*" (Matthew 5:3, 6).

**Here is a man God calls a fool** (v. 20). — "*But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*"

**Here is a question for my soul and yours: —Are we rich toward God?**

"But God said unto him, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be*

required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (vv. 20-21).

Blessed are they who are rich toward God! O my soul, Seek to be rich toward God! This is true wisdom. This is truly providing for time to come. This is genuine prudence. The wise man is he who does not think only of earthly treasure, but of treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:31-33; Colossians 3:1-3).

When can it be said of a man, that he is rich towards God? — Never, until he is rich in grace, and rich in faith. — Never, until he has come to Christ, and bought of him gold tried in the fire (Revelation 3:18). — Never, until he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! — Never, until, by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, he reads his name inscribed in the book of life, and is made an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ!

He that is rich toward God, acknowledges that he receives all his riches from God. He gives up all into the hands of God. He depends upon the providence of God. He seeks to use all he has for the honor and glory, the furtherance of the Gospel, and the good of men’s souls. He who is rich toward God is principally concerned for the riches of God’s grace and glory in Christ. He who is rich toward God has Christ! — Such a man is truly rich!

- Rich with Grace (Ephesians 1:3)
- Rich in Grace (Galatians 5:22-23)
- Rich with Forgiveness
- Rich in Righteousness
- Rich in Glory

Such a man, I say, is truly rich! His treasure is incorruptible. His bank never breaks. His inheritance fades not away. Man cannot deprive him of it. Death cannot snatch it out of his hands. All things are his already: — life, death, things present, and things to come (1 Corinthians 3:23). Best of all, what he has now

is nothing to what he will have hereafter.

The eternal riches of God's free grace in Christ are within reach of every sinner who comes to Christ. Never rest until they are yours, until the Son of God says to you, "*Thou art rich*" (Revelation 2:9; 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19; Proverbs 21:26; Ecclesiastes 5:10; Job 21:7-15; Proverbs 8:18-21).

# Chapter 79

## “Neither be Ye of Doubtful Mind”

### Luke 12:23-31

“The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Luke 12:23-31).

In this passage, our Savior bids us care for our souls and the eternal interests of our immortal souls. Our chief concern regarding ourselves ought to be our hearts, specifically our hearts’ relationship to our God. Solomon said, “*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*” Most people take great care in adorning their bodies, but give little thought to the ornaments of the soul. The feeding of the body involves much care, but the supply of spiritual food is neglected. But our bodies are only the abode in which we dwell for a time. We are living souls! The soul is immortal. The body will soon become food for

worms. How I wish we could grasp this fact! —) “*For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*” (Mark 8:36-37)

## Trust God's Providence

The Son of God calls our attention to the higher and nobler part of our beings, and bids us see to it that our souls are in a right state. He here teaches us, his true disciples, to seek God's grace, to trust him as our Lord and Savior, and to make certain that all is well with our souls. But our Lord's instruction in this passage is principally about trusting his wise and good providence in the everyday affairs of our lives.

No doubt there are some people who are in easier circumstances than others, some who are in positions where they enjoy many comforts, while others are in places where they suffer many hardships. But our circumstances have little to do with our lives in reality. Our circumstances are temporary and change quickly.

Happiness, contentment, peace of mind are not found in circumstances, but in our inner beings, in our soundness of heart, in our minds. The inner man has far more to do with one's joy or sorrow than anything outside us.

There have been some who have been perfectly free in a prison, while others have been in absolute bondage with wide estates to roam over. I have known some, whose spirits have triumphed when all around has tended to depress them. I have seen others, who were wretched and desponding when they had, apparently, all that heart could wish.

It is the heart, the mind, the soul, that is the main thing. Your inner self is that which brings you daylight or midnight, wealth or poverty, peace or war. If we spent half the time, energy, and care on our souls that we spend in trying to better our circumstances we would be in a far better condition. We would all be wise to concentrate on fitting circumstances to our hearts rather than

trying to fit our hearts to our circumstances.

Try as you may, you cannot alter the world in which your lot is cast, and you cannot alter God's providential arrangements. Would it not be better to alter yourself to God's providence and be resigned to his will? Of course it would!

## Indoor Work

Did you ever notice how often, in the Book of God, the inspired writers of Holy Scripture busied themselves with what one old writer called "indoor work" — the work that has to be done within one's own heart?

*"Bless the Lord, O my soul,"* says David, in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Psalm; *"and all that is within me, bless his holy name."* This indoor work always pays best; and our Lord Jesus, in his exhortations, constantly urges us attend to it. He said to his disciples, *"Let not your heart be troubled."* A little later, he said, *"In the world ye shall have tribulation."* He says the same to his disciples in every age. We cannot avoid tribulation. Yet, our Master says, *"Let not your heart be troubled."* All the water in the sea will not hurt your ship so long as you keep it outside. The danger starts when it gets inside the ship. — It matters little what is outside you, if all is right within. So long as the Dove of heaven in our hearts enables us to sing sweetly of the love of God and causes the flower "Heart's-ease" to bloom in our souls, we can and will be at peace, content, and joyful in the wilderness of trouble, the desert of care, and the raging sea of tribulation.

As C. H. Spurgeon put it, "A hurricane of afflictions may beat about you, yet you shall be a blessed man, for all the elements of blessedness are within your own heart. God has given them to you, and the devil himself cannot take them away."

## Doubtful Mind

This is God's message to you and me: — *"Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind"*

(v. 29). The language used by our Lord in this verse is very unusual. The word translated “*doubtful*” is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. It means “midair.” It appears to have something to do with meteors, so that the passage might be rendered, “Neither be ye of meteoric mind.” Even more literally, we might read it, “Neither have your mid in the clouds,” or “Do not have a cloudy mind.”

Our Lord’s word here is an imperative command. He is saying, “Stop seeking what you shall eat or what you shall drink, and stop living in suspense.” He is telling us to quit living like birds in the air, flighty and unsettled. He is saying, “Do not let your mind be tossed about like clouds in the air by every wind of circumstance.”

The word “*doubtful*” is so pregnant with meaning that I have no hope of expounding it. Rather, I will simply give you some of the things suggested by it. — “*Neither be ye of doubtful mind.*”

## Stop Being Anxious

The first thing our Lord requires of us here is this: Child of God, stop being anxious. Stop worrying. Stop being tossed up and down by your outward circumstances. If God prospers you, do not allow that to make you soar. If he empties you, do not allow that to make you sink. If God sends you a little pleasure, do not allow that to put your head in the clouds. If he sends you heaviness and sorrow, do not allow that to put your head in the dust. Stop being so greatly affected by external things. Stop worrying. Do not allow your heart to fret. Cease from your anxious care about your circumstance.

“Rejoice in the Lord alway: *and* again I say, Rejoice. (5) Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand. (6) Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. (7) And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (8) Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things

*are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things. (9) Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” (Philippians 4:4-9)

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. (2) Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. (3) For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:1-3)

Our Savior’s injunction in Luke 12:29 means, “Do not be anxious about your temporal affairs.” Be prudent. We have no right to spend the money of other people, nor even our own, in wastefulness. We are to be careful and discreet. Every believer should constantly remember that he is only a steward, and that he is accountable to his Master for whatever he has, and the use he makes of it. But when we have done our best with what God has trusted to our hands, do not worry because you cannot make more of it. And when you have done your best to meet your expenses, do not sit down, and wring your hands because you cannot make them less.

I cannot turn a dime into a dollar. If I must sometimes live from hand to mouth, that is God’s purpose. He commonly feeds his children with daily manna. Seldom does he give bread to his own for weeks and months and years, but daily. Why, then, should we be staggered, much less astonished by such experiences?

It is irresponsible for anyone to live greedily and bring hardship upon himself and his family because he can never have enough toys. But it is insane to fret about things over which you have absolutely no control. All the worrying in the world will not alter what is, has been, or shall be.

Have you ever made any profit by biting your nails and pacing the floor? Have you ever gained anything by worrying? I

have never seen anyone get comfort from the blanket of worry. I have never seen anyone fetch grist to the mill by fretting, or any meal to the barrel.

Perhaps you are thinking, “I know that is right, but I cannot help fretting and worrying.” I beg your pardon. Are you a believer? The Lord Jesus says to you, “Stop worrying.” “Stop being of a doubtful mind.” That means stop. And he would not tell us to stop, if we could not stop. Would he? No. The fact is, our worrying is a matter of disobedience and unbelief.

More than that — We only make matters worse by worrying. Have you not always found that to be the case? It is not our difficulty that makes us unfit for anything, but our unbelief that makes us unfit for our difficulties. In all the troubles of our lives, we would be wise to heed the often repeated words of Moses to the children of Israel before the Red Sea: — “*Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord!*” — “*The battle is not yours, but the Lord’s.*”

“Fear thou not; for I *am* with thee: be not dismayed; for I *am* thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. (11) Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. (12) Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, *even* them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. (13) For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. (14) Fear not, thou worm Jacob, *and* ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.” (Isaiah 41:10-14)

“He sits a Sovereign on his throne  
And ruleth all things well”?

Our Savior demands that we stop worrying, and cast all our care upon him, because he truly does care for us.

## Stop Being Ambitious

Worry has far more to do with proud, personal ambition than any of us want to acknowledge. So, I cannot fail to show you *second*, that another meaning of our Lord's admonition is "Stop being ambitious." God's word to Baruch is God's word to us all. — "*Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not. Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted will I pluck up*" (Jeremiah 45:4-5).

Most of us are too much like meteors in the sky, soaring high with great thoughts about ourselves, but sporadic and unstable. That ought not be. May God give us grace to seek wisdom not wealth, faith not fame, and patience not praise. We all need to have the wings of our proud ambition clipped. We ought not soar so high as we do in ambition for ourselves. We ought to strive to be great, and stop striving for greatness. We ought to be ambitious for goodness, not for glory. We ought to seek acceptance with God, not the applause of men. We ought to be ambitious for favor with God, not fame among men.

## Stop Being Unstable

A third meaning of the Savior's exhortation is this: — "Stop being unstable in your mind." We ought to be men and women of resolute, decisive, stable character. If you look at the context, you will see that this meaning fits very well. Many there are who are time-servers. Their thoughts are consumed with they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or how they shall be clothed. They are always watching to see which is the best way to go to get what they want. As the old proverb has it, "they know on which side their bread is buttered." They wait to see which way the wind blows, and then are moved with great passion in the same direction.

God's people are cut from different cloth. Grace makes people resolute, decisive, and stable. — "*God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*" Like Jephthah of old, having lifted their hands to the Lord, they

cannot and will not go back. Like Joshua, they are determined, no matter which way the tide runs, — “*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*”

Our Lord says, to you and me, “*Neither be ye of doubtful mind.*” The long and short of it is this — In any circumstance, at any time, tell me what is right, and you have told me what I must do. If I give consideration to anything else, I will not do what I know is right. Show me God’s will, and you have shown me my path. If I give consideration to anyone else’s will I will not do God’s will. If we would walk with God, we must not confer with flesh and blood (Galatians 1:16).

## Stop Doubting God

*Fourth*, our Lord Jesus here says to his believing people, “Stop being of a doubtful mind with regard to God’s goodness, grace and mercy. Neither be ye of doubtful mind regarding your soul’s salvation.”

There are many who are not saved who are very confident that they are. There are many, who know nothing of the grace of God who sing, and sing with great liveliness,

Blessed assurance! Jesus is mine,  
O what a foretaste of glory divine!

Such presumption is deadly. But, then, there are those who make doubt a vital point of godliness. That too is horrible. Our Lord says to you who trust him, and to me, no matter what our circumstances, no matter what our feelings, no matter what our failings may be, no matter how great, — “*Neither be ye of doubtful mind!*” Our salvation is a matter of faith, not of feeling. Child of God, hear and heed the word of your Savior, — “*Neither be ye of doubtful mind!*”

We have entirely too many fears for a people to whom the Lord God has said, “*Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness*” (Isaiah 41:10).

Why can't we believe God? Has he not proved his great faithfulness to us? David heard God's promise and believed him. His faith in God gave quietness to his heart. God's promises quietened his fears. Didn't they? "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me*" (Psalms 23:4). — "*I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety*" (Psalms 4:8). — "*When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up*" (Psalms 27:10).

We have far too much anxiety and worry about earthly, material things for a people to whom the Son of God has said, "*Why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*" (Matthew 6:28-30)

It is written in the Scriptures, "*But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:19). — Why should I worry, fret and pace the floor by day and by night, when God my Savior has promised that my Father will for his sake provide me with everything I need in this world? Why should I concern myself about that which God, who cannot lie, has promised?

"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matthew 6:31-34)

We have far too many doubts concerning God's mercy, love and grace for a people to whom the Lord Jesus Christ has said,

*“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Our shameful, sinful, baseless doubts are inexcusable. — “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28).*

Upon what grounds dare we call into question the mercy, love and grace of God? We have absolutely no reason to entertain any doubt concerning him! Did he promise; and shall he not fulfill it? Perish the thought! The Scripture says, *“He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life.”* I believe the Son of God. I have life! Why should we question that, ever? Paul was a sinner, just like us, save by grace, just like us. He didn’t question God’s promise (2 Timothy 1:12; 4:6-8; Romans 8:31-39).

I am not going to doubt God’s love because of something I have thought, or said, or done. His love is unconditional and free! I am not going to question his grace because of my sin. His grace superabounds where sin is found! I am not going to be suspicious of his mercy because I do not deserve his mercy. His mercy is for the undeserving! I am not going to doubt his faithfulness because of my unfaithfulness. His faithfulness stands forever! — *“If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).* — *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” (2 Timothy 2:19).*

We spend entirely too much time grumbling and complaining about our trials and troubles for a people to whom the Lord Jesus has said. — *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).*

We ought not be surprised when troubles come our way. We ought to be surprised when they don’t come! As long as we live in this world, we are going to have trials, troubles, temptations and sorrows.

God in Israel sows the seeds  
Of affliction, pain and toil.

These spring up and choke the weeds  
That would else o'erspread the soil.

Every ounce of gold that has ever been perfected and made valuable has been refined by fire. And if God puts the gold of his grace in us, he will also make us pass through the fire. — *“Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction”* (Isaiah 48:10). — *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you”* (1 Peter 4:12).

Trouble is not a strange thing. For the believer, the absence of trouble is a strange thing. Yet, when we meet with some great difficulty, some heavy trial, some heart-breaking sorrow, though we may not say it, our first shameful, wicked thought is usually, “Why me?” Our first thought really ought to be, “Why not me?”

Shall I be carried to the skies  
On flowery beds of ease,  
While others fought to when the prize  
And sailed through bloody seas?

Our trials are nothing compared to what others have had to endure before us. Our sorrows are nothing compared to the sorrows our Master endured to have us. Our grief is nothing compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us!

We have entirely too much attachment to this world and to this present life, for a people who are looking for a city whose Builder and Maker is God ((Hebrews 11:8-10; 2 Corinthians 5:1). We know that *“to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”* We have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Believers are a people who long to be with Christ. Yet, it is so difficult for us to be torn loose from this present existence called “life.”

The only way for us to be delivered from these carnal principles, the only way we will ever be delivered from the cares of this world, the only way we will ever be saved from our fears, concerns, doubts, grumblings, and attachments to this world is to find something better. Our religious works will be dropped like a hot potato, if we ever see and get hold of Christ’s finished work.

Our boasted good deeds will be of no value, if we are allowed and made to see what Christ has done for sinners. Our righteousnesses will appear to us as they really are, as filthy rags, if ever we behold the righteousness of God in Christ. Our goodliness will wither and die like mown grass in a furnace, if we ever see the goodness and glory of God in Christ (Isaiah 6:1-6). If ever we see Christ there will be no more, argument about our goodness, debate about our worth, or fuss about our will.

Even so, our fears, our doubts, our grumblings, our complaints against our little trials, our complaints against our God's providence and purpose will disappear in proportion to the faith we have in his promises (Isaiah 43:1-5; 46:4; Romans 8:28-32). The more fully I believe his "*I WILL*," the less I will fear. The less I believe his "*I WILL*," the more I will fear.

# Chapter 80

## First Things First

### Luke 12:22-31

“And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Luke 12:22-31).

When our daughter was a child, my wife and I tried to teach her to look beyond the end of her nose. Even as a small child, we tried to get her to focus her attention on things that really mattered. That did not mean that she wasn't allowed to play games, have fun, and enjoy the various stages of her childhood. — Not at all. But we did work at not allowing her to live for games and fun and frivolity.

Why? — Because a child that grows up without learning responsibility is likely to live that way for the rest of his/her life. Such a child grows up to be a miserable, useless, self-centered, whining adult. We did not want that for our daughter, any more than you want that for your children. So we constantly pressed her to keep her priorities in order and to keep her mind focused on things that really matter.

Why was it necessary for us to constantly remind her of the importance of these things? The sad fact is, unless we are continually reminded that some things are unimportant, other things slightly important, other things very important, and a few things most important, we will all spend our lives pursuing, worrying about, and crying over things that are utterly insignificant, while neglecting those things that are truly important.

In the passage before us the Lord Jesus tells us to get our priorities focused. Remember the context. Our Lord has just given us the parable of the rich fool, telling us that those who live for this world, neglecting their immortal souls, are fools. Then, he gives us the rich, instructive words found in Luke 12:22-31.

We will have that upon which we set our hearts. So, “*set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Colossians 3:2).

## A Fact to Remember

“And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body *is more* than raiment” (vv. 22-23).

Here is a fact to remember. — There is more to life than the gratification of animal cravings and the adornment of the body. Yet, these are the things about which all men and women most naturally devote most of their thoughts and energy. This is the very thing Paul is talking about when he says, “*Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content*” (1 Timothy 4:8).

We only live in these bodies. Life is what is inside the body. Life is not that which is sustained by meat; but that which is sustained by grace. Beauty is not something you can buy in a clothing store, or in a plastic surgeon's office. Beauty is the hidden man of the heart, Christ Jesus, "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*" (Colossians 1:27; 1 Peter 3:1-6).

## Some things to Consider

Here are some things to consider. Our Savior is calling us away from the care of the world and calling us to faith, calling us to honor God by believing him. He does so by pointing out some things that ought to be obvious to every kindergarten child. They may seem to be simple, insignificant, almost trivial lessons to carnal minds; but the things mentioned in this passage are matters of deepest importance. The more I ponder them, the weightier they become. The more I study them, the more profound they appear.

**Consider the ravens.** — "*Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?*" (v. 24) If God almighty condescends to provide for the needs of a bird, a raven at that, if he orders the affairs of providence to give the ravens their daily food, is it reasonable for us to ever imagine that he might fail to provide for us?

**Consider yourself.** — "*And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?*" (v. 25) The word here translated "*stature*" should probably be translated "life," or "age," as it is in John 9:21 and 23 and Hebrews 11:11. What our Lord is saying here is that none of us can, by any means, add one thing to the height of our physical frames, or to our age, or to the days of our lives.

Our days are "*as an handbreadth*" (Psalm 39:5). — Considerably less than one cubit! If we are not able to add anything to the number of our days on this earth, it is utterly absurd to spend our time and energy fretting about how we can

do so! — “*If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?*” (v. 26) Far better it is for us to say with David, “*My times are in thy hands,*” and rejoice to know that it is so.

**Consider the lilies.** — “*Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?*” (v. 27-28) If the Lord God every year provides the lilies with fresh foliage and fresh blooms, how absurd it is for us to imagine that he might fail to clothe us today, or tomorrow.

**Consider the heathen.** — “*For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things*” (v. 30). What a shame it is for God’s people to grovel like the heathen of this world after the things of the world. If God is my Father and Christ my Savior and the Holy Spirit my Comforter, if heaven is my home and eternity is the span of my life, I ought not find it difficult to live above the cares of and anxieties of the heathen. Faith in Christ ought to make my heart light. The light of eternity ought to make the things of earth grow dim. Heavenly glory ought to make the baubles of earth utterly insignificant to me.

**Consider your Father.** — “*Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things*” (v. 30). This fact alone ought to make us perfectly content. All our needs in this world are perfectly known to our Father, the Lord of heaven and earth. He can relieve our needs whenever he sees fit; and he will relieve our needs whenever it is best for us that they be relieved. He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to death to ransom our souls, he who gave us his darling Son will not fail to give us everything we need.

Let us consider these facts. May God the Holy Spirit write them upon the tables of our hearts and cause them to bring forth fruit in our lives. Nothing is more common to men than worrying about things over which they have no control. Nothing is more

contradictory to our professed faith in the living God than worrying about the things of this world and our lives in it. And nothing so honors our God as confidently trusting him.

“The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” (Psalm 23:1-6)

## A Call to Faith

Here is a call to faith in our God. — *“If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things”* (vv. 28-30). Oh, may God the Holy Spirit create and sustain in our souls confident faith in God our Savior, teaching us day by day to trust his infinite wisdom, goodness, grace, love, power, promises, faithfulness, and mercy, teaching us day by day to rest in his providence!

## A Kingdom to Seek

In verse 31 our Lord directs our hearts heavenward and tells us of a kingdom to seek. — *“But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.”* We all know that our first priority in life ought to be the kingdom and glory of our God. We must not give our hearts to this world. Let us not live as though we were animals, without immortal souls. May God give

us grace to live as men and women who are constantly aware that our lives in this world are but a very brief prelude to another world, as men and women with immortal souls to be saved or lost. You and I have a death to die, a God to meet, a judgment to face, and an eternity awaiting us!

Those things need to be ever before our hearts and minds. But when can it be said that a person is seeking the kingdom of God? Am I seeking the kingdom of God? Are you? I know this: — The kingdom of God is the only thing worth seeking! And I know this: — A person is seeking the kingdom of God when he is living in the pursuit of Christ. — “*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*” (Hebrews 12:14; Philippians 3:3-14).

### A Promise from Christ

Here is a promise from Christ to content our hearts.—“*All these things shall be added unto you*” (v. 31). That person who sets his heart upon Christ and eternity shall never lack anything in this world that he needs. He shall always have exactly enough of everything (Psalms 37:25; 84:11; Isaiah 3:10; 33:16; Romans 8:28-32; Psalm 23:1-6).

# Chapter 81

## “Your Father’s Good Pleasure”

Luke 12:32-40

“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about, and [your] lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed [are] those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find [them] so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not” (Luke 12:32-40).

What tremendous words of consolation, instruction, and hope we have before us in this passage. How well our Master knows our hearts! How quick he is to condescend to our low estate and meet our needs!

## A Soul-cheering Assurance

The first thing I see in our text is a soul-cheering assurance. — *“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”* (v. 32). Our Lord Jesus knew that these disciples were filled with many fears, and that we would often be tossed about with the same. They were few in number. Their adversaries were many and great. They had to face great difficulties. They were but weak, sinful men. They had a great work to do. And they knew themselves unworthy and altogether insufficient for the work. Being aware of all these fears that these disciples faced, all the fears that we must face, our ever gracious Redeemer speaks this word of grace: — *“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”* In that one, golden sentence, he gives us great assurances to comfort our hearts and cheer our souls.

God’s church in this world is a *“little flock.”* The word might be better translated *“very little flock.”* The fact is, God’s people in this world are now, always have been, and always shall be but a very little flock. There are multitudes who wear the name of Christ, multitudes who meet regularly in houses of worship, multitudes who have a profession of faith; but true believers are always but a very little flock in this world. We ought never be surprised by this fact. It is vain to expect it to be otherwise, *“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”* (Matthew 7:14).

There shall always be a remnant according to the election of grace; but God’s elect shall always be but a remnant, until our Lord comes again. Yes, God’s people are but a very little flock; but we are his little flock! Christ is our Shepherd. He chose us to be his sheep. He bought us with his blood. He sought us out and found us. He is carrying us home. He will never let us go. We are constantly under his tender care.

This passage also assures us that we have a great and gracious Father. You and I are tenderly loved by God the Father, who has made himself our Father. What a privilege! The God of Glory is our heavenly Father. He adopted us as his dear children. He

rejoices over us as the objects of his love. He sees no spot in us. He delights in us as he delights in Christ. He receives us graciously. He is well-pleased with us in Christ, even as he is well-pleased with Christ.

Even now, when the holy Lord God looks down upon us from heaven, with all our fears and infirmities, he sees us in Christ and smiles with approval, just as fully as he shall when he presents us before his glory and welcomes us into his kingdom (Jude 24-25). Because our heavenly Father is well-pleased with his chosen in Christ, as one with Christ, it is our Father's good pleasure to give us his kingdom. — *"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*

There is a glorious, eternal kingdom awaiting us, a kingdom which is our Father's pleasure, his delight to give us. Here we are troubled, tried, and tempted. Here we are mocked, ridiculed, and despised. Here we are counted the off-scouring of the earth. But that will not be the case for long (Romans 8:18; Colossians 3:4; Revelation 19:1-9). It is our Father's good pleasure to give us his kingdom, all of it; and that which God is pleased to do, God will do.

Are you a part of God's little flock? If we are a part of this flock, we have nothing to fear. Our God has given us exceeding great and precious promises (2 Peter 1:4), and they are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. God is ours. Christ is ours. Eternity is ours. All things are ours. The world, the flesh and the devil may oppose us; but God is for us. And, *"if God be for us, who can be against us?"*

## A Heart-searching Fact

Next, in verses 33 and 34 I see a heart searching fact. — *"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* Our Savior's exhortations are plain and demanding, but plain and unmistakable.— *"Sell that ye have."* He says, "Give alms." His requirement is, *"provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth."* Then, he adds this heart

searching fact: — “*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*”

“Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (vv. 33-34).

We are to sell what we have. Without question this is a figurative thing, not to be taken literally. There is nothing in the New Testament that suggests that a person is to impoverish himself, or sell off his property to be a follower of Christ. On the contrary, we are required to faithfully and diligently provide for our families (1 Timothy 5:8).

What, then, is the meaning of this exhortation? It is just this: — We are to sell, or give up anything and everything that stands between us and Christ. This is an exhortation to self-denial. Faith in Christ involves the giving of our lives, of all that we are and have to the dominion and disposal of our Lord.

Next, the Lord Jesus teaches us that we are to give. The giving of alms speaks of charity and kindness to those in need. We are to be more ready to use what God has trusted to our hands for the benefit of others, particularly for the benefit of his kingdom and the furtherance of the gospel, than to hoard it up for ourselves and to gratify our carnal lust for earthly things.

The New Testament teaches nothing about tithing; but it teaches us much about giving. All of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 8, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9 are taken up with this subject. But there are no commands to the people of God anywhere in the New Testament about how much we are to give, when we are to give, or where we are to give. Tithing and all systems like it are things altogether foreign to the New Testament. Like all other acts of worship, giving is an act of grace. It must be free and voluntary. Yet, there are some plain, simple guidelines laid down in the New Testament for us to follow.

1. Christian giving must be motivated by love and

gratitude for Christ (2 Corinthians 8:8-9). Love needs no law. It is a law unto itself. It is the most powerful and most generous of all motives.

2. Our gifts must arise from willing hearts (2 Corinthians 8:12). If that which we give arises from a willing heart, if it is given freely and cheerfully, it is accepted of God. The Lord is not concerned with the amount of our gift, be it great or small. He looks to the motive behind it.

3. We should give to the work of the gospel in proportion to our blessings from the Lord (1 Corinthians 16:2). We are expected to give generously in accordance with our own ability.

4. All of God's people should give ('everyone,' 1 Corinthians 16:2; 'every man,' 2 Corinthians 9:7). Men and women, rich and poor, old and young, all who are saved by the grace of God are expected to give for the support of God's church and kingdom.

5. We should be both liberal and sacrificial in our giving (2 Corinthians 9:5-6). We have not really given anything until we have taken that which we need, want and have use for and given it to the Lord (Mark 12:41-44).

6. Our gifts must be voluntary (2 Corinthians. 9:7).

7. We are to give as unto the Lord (Matthew 6:1-5). We give, not to be seen of men, but for the honour of Christ, hoping for nothing in return.

8. This kind of giving is well-pleasing to God (Philippians 4:18; Hebrews 13:16).

Then our Lord here tells us to provide ourselves treasure in the heavens. That is to say, we are to make our calling and election sure, to lay hold of eternal life, to make certain that Christ is ours. This is true wisdom. This is true prudence. As J. C. Ryle put it...

“The man who does well for himself is the man who gives up everything for Christ's sake. He makes the best of bargains. He carries the cross for a few years in this world, and in the world to come has everlasting life. He obtains the best of possessions. He carries his riches with him beyond the grave. He is rich in grace here and rich in

glory hereafter. And, best of all, what he obtains by faith in Christ he never loses. It is that good part which is never taken away.”

“*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*” — Where is your treasure? If we will be honest, that question will be easily answered. What do we love? What occupies our hearts and minds? Upon what is our affection set? It matters nothing what we say, what we profess to believe, how orthodox our creed is, or how highly respected we are by others. Where is our treasure? That is where our heart is. If our treasure is here, our hearts are here. If our treasure is in heaven, our hearts are in heaven.

### A Readiness for Christ

Third, our Lord shows us what it is to be ready for his glorious second advent.

“Let your loins be girded about, and [your] lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed [are] those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find [them] so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” (vv 35-40)

We have here a picture of what we ought to be at all times. We ought to be a people watching for Christ’s return, always living upon the tiptoe of faith and expectation (Titus 2:11-14). If we would live in the relentless anticipation of Christ’s return, we must gird up our loins, ready always to do our Master’s bidding. We must ever have our lights burning, watching for and

welcoming our Lord.

Luke 12:37 is one of the most remarkable passages to be found in all the volume of Holy Scripture. — *“Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.”* Christ is coming again. He is coming now (Revelation 1:7). When he comes, he will gird himself, make us sit down at his table, and serve us! What can that mean?

We have a hint of this in Luke 22:18. — *“For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.”* There is reference to this back in Isaiah 25:6. — *“And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.”* The meaning of this promise is indescribably beyond the scope of my comprehension; but of this I am sure: — There is no degree of honor, glory, happiness, and bliss that the Lord Jesus Christ will withhold from those who love his appearing (John 14:1-3; Revelation 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Timothy 4:8). — *“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom!”*

# Chapter 82

## God's Servants The Faithful and the Evil

Luke 12:41-48

“Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom [his] lord shall make ruler over his household, to give [them their] portion of meat in due season? Blessed [is] that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for [him], and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not [himself], neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many [stripes]. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few [stripes]. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:41-48).

Poor Peter, it appears that he always had his foot in his mouth. But how many of us, like him, have heard a message, maybe a little biting, and thought to ourselves, if we did not openly ask, “Was he talking to me?” Peter just blurted it out. He

said, “Lord, were you talking to us or to everybody?” The Lord Jesus seems to have just ignored the question; but he really didn’t. He gave the same instruction again in more detail.

In these verses our Savior again gives us a parable in which he describes two servants, one faithful, the other evil. Notice that both the faithful and the evil are the Lord’s servants. The fact is, all things serve the gracious purposes of God toward his elect (Proverbs 16:4; 21:1; Psalm 76:10). Satan is as much the servant of God, though unwillingly, as Gabriel is willingly. The fallen angels, the very demons of hell, are as fully the servants of God, though they despise him, as are the angels of heaven who adore him. Every human being is the servant of God, too.

Some of us rejoice in that fact. What a privilege is ours to serve the living God! Others despise the thought of God’s dominion; but they are nonetheless under God’s dominion and serve his purposes (Romans 8:28; 11:36; Ephesians 1:11). Our God rules everywhere, everything, and everyone, totally and absolutely!

Even those evil men who are false prophets and messengers of Satan, deceiving the souls of men with their perverse doctrine, are the servants of our God, sovereignly used by him to accomplish his purpose (1 Corinthians 11:19). — This parable is a word of instruction, inspiration, and warning to those men who stand in the house of God as his servants.

## **God's Faithful Servants**

In verses 42-44 our Lord gives us a description of God’s faithful servants. Without question, the instruction of the parable may be applied to every believer in his particular calling in life. We who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ gladly bow to his dominion as our Lord. We are his servants. Our lives are spent in his service. Whatever your particular gifts are, whatever your station in life may be, that is the place of your calling and service in the kingdom of God where you are to use your gifts for the glory of Christ and the good of his people. Be God’s faithful servant where you are.

Those men who are gifted of God to be preachers and teachers in his church and are not called and gifted as pastors, are also his servants. They ought to be highly regarded as such. God gifts some local churches with more than one man, sometimes with many men who are clearly gifted of God as preachers and teachers of the Word, though only one is gifted and called to pastor the assembly. Those men are to be heard and treated with the respect that their gifts demand, as the servants of God. But in this passage our Lord is talking about that specific group of men who are trusted of God with the care of his household as pastors of local churches (v. 42). — What a great trust (2 Corinthians 4:7; Ephesians 3:7-8).

You may never be a pastor; but you will, as long as you are in this world, need the services of a faithful pastor. You will be wise to know what to expect from God's servant, how to pray for him, and how best to assist him in the work God has trusted to his hands. And you need to know how to recognize and distinguish between a faithful and an evil servant. You will be wise to ask God the Holy Spirit to teach you the things here taught by the Son of God.

In these verses our Lord Jesus Christ describes his faithful servant, a faithful gospel preacher, a faithful pastor by four things in which he is distinguished from a self-serving false prophet. These four things describe and are characteristic of God's true servants in every age of the church and in every place where gospel churches are found.

## 1. His Position —

God's servant is here described as one "*whom his lord hath made ruler over his household.*"

The church of God is his household, the household of faith, and the household of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is God's family and God's church, not mine, not yours, not this or that denomination's, but the Lord's! It is God's House and God's Temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Ephesians 3:15; 1 Timothy 3:15).

In the family of God there are some fathers, some young men, and some children. There are some who are strong and some who are weak. There are some who are very independent and need little attention, and some who need a good bit of attention. Each one has been placed in his house and family exactly according to the Master's will.

God ordained pastors have been placed by him as rulers over his household. They are not tyrants, dictators, or lords over God's household, but rulers placed over the house to govern it as stewards under Christ (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:4-5; Hebrews 13:7, 17).

Most preachers these days are Junebug preachers. The church, the deacon board, the board of elders, or the denomination has a string tied to his leg and controls everything he does, like a little boy ties a string around a Junebug's leg. — Not God's servants. God's servants serve his people; but they are not controlled by them.

Where in the Word of God can you find a prophet, or a preacher who was ruled, governed, or even influenced by the will of the people to whom he was sent to preach? The only preacher like that you can find in the Book of God is a hireling prophet. God's servants are responsible under God to rule his house by his Word, according to his revealed will (2 Timothy 3:16).

A faithful steward rules his Master's house exactly according to his Master's will. As he does, all in the house are expected to honor and obey the steward in charge of the house. And that household is most honorable and most happy that is well-governed, with each member of the family knowing his place, working together with every other member in love for the welfare of the whole family.

## 2. His Work —

The pastor's work is "to give them their portion of meat in due season."

How I wish I could make this generation understand that it is

the work, the calling, and the responsibility of gospel preachers to feed the church of God with knowledge and understanding, with gospel truth (Jeremiah 3:15; Acts 20:28). It is not the pastor's work to be a good socializer, an analyst, a therapist, a counselor, a priest, or a community door knocker. God's servants are preachers! They feed the house of God by preaching the gospel, by opening the bread of life and dispensing it to the family. If a pastor does that, he has to spend his time in his study, not running the roads and chasing ambulances (2 Timothy 2:15).

It is the work of the pastor "*to give,*" not to take (Ezekiel 34:7-8). That which is to be given is "*meat.*" It is not our business to enact laws, but to give meat. It is not our business to regulate the lives of men, but to feed their souls. And that with which God's servants feed his children is the sweet meat of the gospel, not the husks of intellectualism, the mists of mysticism, the stones of useless doctrinal speculation, or the poison of heresy. God's servants come with the meat of saving grace in the knowledge of Christ, declaring ruin by the fall, redemption by the blood, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit!

We are to feed the saints of God with "*meat in due season.*" The Word of God must be rightly divided; and each member of the family must be fed with the meat that is suitable for him at the time: — Grace for the Guilty, — Pardon for the Fallen, — Redemption for the Ruined, — Righteousness for the Wicked, — Cleansing for the Defiled, — Reproof for the Wayward, — Comfort for the Troubled, — Strength for the Weak, Christ for All!

### 3. His Character —

Our Lord describes his servants as men with these two traits of character: "*faithful and wise.*"

God's servants are faithful men (1 Corinthians 4:2). They are stewards of the mysteries of God, of the manifold grace of God, and of the unsearchable riches of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:1; 1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 3:8). John Gill wrote...

“They are faithful to the trust reposed in them. They preach the pure gospel of Christ, and the whole of it; conceal no part, nor keep anything of it; seek not to please men, but God; neither seek their own things, their ease, honor, and profit, but the glory of God, the honor of Christ, and the good of souls; and abide by the truths, cause, and interest of the Redeemer at all costs.”

A faithful minister of Jesus Christ is one that sincerely seeks his Master’s honor, not his own. He preaches Christ crucified in all the counsel of God, not his own thoughts and whims. He follows Christ’s doctrine and adheres to his ordinances exactly as the Master gave them. And he exercises the work of the ministry, caring for the souls of men, without respect of persons.

As they are faithful, God’s servants are wise. They are neither faithful nor wise by nature; but God makes them faithful and wise by grace and by his gifts upon them, making them fit and able ministers of the gospel. They are well-instructed in the things of God, given a clear understanding in the doctrine of the gospel, and wisely exercise their talents and gifts for the glory of God.

They constantly seek to improve their knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures, making the best use of their time in prayer and study, laboring in the Word and doctrine of Christ. They arrange and manage the affairs of their lives to best serve Christ and his people. God graciously gives his servants wisdom to guide and direct his people and to care for them, as a father guides and cares for his family.

The faithful and wise pastor is a man who is doing what God called him to do. — “*Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing*” (v. 43). God’s servant always has something to do. And he is always found doing what he has been sent and called of God to do. He is not found dreaming, or loitering, or talking, but doing his Master’s will and work, feeding his sheep. God’s servant is constant in his labor and perseveres in the work God has put into his hands. Someone once asked John Calvin, “What do you want the Lord to find when he comes?” Calvin answered, “I want him to find me not idle when

he comes?”

#### 4. His Reward —

*“Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath”* (vv. 43-44).

The Scriptures nowhere teach, or even imply that there shall be degrees of reward in heaven. That is contrary to everything taught in the gospel (Romans 8:17). Certainly, our Lord does not exalt one servant in his kingdom above another. But God does reward faithfulness, both in this world and in the world to come. Those who are faithful over a few things shall be made Lord over many things (Luke 19:17). Frequently, God honors faithful service by giving greater service to perform. God’s servants shall find immensely great reward in seeing those for whom they have labored around the throne of Christ in glory (1 Thessalonians 2:19). And God’s faithful and wise servants shall themselves inherit all things with Christ in glory (John 17:5, 22). — *“He will make him lord over all that he hath.”*

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.” (Isaiah 52:7-8)

“I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, *which* shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence. And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” (Isaiah 62:6-7)

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love

for their work's sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves.”  
(1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

## God's Evil Servants

“But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” (vv. 45-48)

Here our Lord Jesus describes those men who are evil servants in the house of God. Here again, our Lord gives us four things which are descriptive of that man who is a false prophet, an evil servant in the house of God. I will not say much about him. But you will see immediately what such a man is.

1. **His Character** — Unbelief (v. 45) “*My lord delayeth his coming.*”
2. **His Conduct** — “*But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken*” (v. 45). In other words, he is legalistic, judgmental, and self-serving.
3. **His Astonishment** — “*The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers*” (v. 46).

“His watchmen *are* blind: they are all ignorant, they *are* all dumb

dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. (Yea, *they are* greedy dogs *which* can never have enough, and they *are* shepherds *that* cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.” (Isaiah 56:10-11)

#### 4. **His Doom** (v.46-48)

In every age, both the faithful and the evil are sovereignly controlled, ruled, overruled, and absolutely under the dominion of our great God. Used by him to accomplish all his will in all the earth. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

## Chapter 83

# “I Am Come to Send Fire on the Earth.”

Luke 12:49-53

“I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law” (Luke 12:49-53).

In Luke 12:49 the Lord Jesus Christ makes a statement that must be shocking to many as they read it. *“I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?”* What does that mean? I do not pretend to know all that is contained in this passage of Scripture, but there is much here to cheer the hearts of God’s elect, inspiring us with devotion, zeal in the cause of Christ, and joyful assurance and hope with regard to everlasting glory. And there is much here to strike terror in the hearts of rebels against the King of Glory and those who merely pretend to serve him in this world.

The Lord Jesus Christ is our Master and Lord, yet he washed his disciples’ feet. But that is not all. If we are

his, if when he comes again he finds us watching for him and serving him, our Master and Lord declares that in that day, in all his robes of glory, he shall gird himself and serve us (Luke 12:35-37). What a remarkable declaration of grace!

### Rebels Warned

Then, in verses 38-40 our Savior issues a warning to all who yet believe not. Believers are people who live in the anticipation, hope, and expectation of the Lord's return. We are watching for him. Only the unbelieving imagine that he delays his coming. Suppose the Son of God were to appear in his glory as you read the words on this page. — Where would you be? Have you lived all your life as if you were your own master? Do you refuse to bow to Christ, refuse to be his servant? Where will you be when the Lord Jesus returns in his glory? — Read verses 41-44 if you dare.

“Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom [his] lord shall make ruler over his household, to give [them their] portion of meat in due season? Blessed [is] that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.”

What rewards Christ has in store for his own eye has not yet seen, ear has not yet heard, and heart has not yet conceived. We cannot begin to imagine the glory that awaits us in heaven! If we are Christ's servants and the servants of our brethren in this world, he will make us rulers over all that he has in the world to come. I have no idea what that means; but it's got to be good. It is a matter of absolute certainty. We shall reign with Christ forever! But that is not true of all.

“But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The

lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for [him], and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.” (Luke 12:45-46)

## Hell's Horrors

I have no idea what the horrors of hell are; but horrors they are! What horror, what terror, what everlasting torment shall be the punishment of every unfaithful steward! — The preacher who is untrue to his professed calling! — The professed believer, who says that he is a child of God, and a servant of Christ, and yet is unfaithful to his Master and Lord! The evil servant is pictured here as that man or woman who is religious, but self-serving, self-righteous, judgmental of others and cruel.

Read the Lord’s words again, and tremble. We are often accused of exaggerating about hell and the wrath of God in the world to come. But, the fact is, these things have not yet been spoken of adequately by any mortal. Read the Book of God. You will find in the Holy Scriptures expressions about hell, the wrath of God, and the torments of the damned that are unparalleled in the writings of men. Hell is a bottomless pit, a place of unquenchable fire, gnawing worms that never die, blackness, darkness, abandonment, everlasting hopelessness, fire and brimstone, torment, and death, an everlasting dying under an everlasting curse!

No, we do not overstate the matter. These are the words of him who loved as never a man loved, of him who is the most tender, gracious, compassionate spirit in the universe. *“The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is net aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.”* Added to everything else, those who find themselves in hell will forever be tormented by the fact that it is their just due!

“And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not [himself], neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many [stripes]. But he that knew not,

and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few [stripes]. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” (Luke 12:47-48)

Let each judge for himself or herself what talents, abilities, and opportunities the Lord God has put in your trust. We must never be content to have done this or that. We are responsible to serve our Master, our Lord, our God in proportion with the talents, abilities, and opportunities he has given us. Who among us is not humbled, broken, and ashamed before God when he thinks of this?

But this passage speaks distinctly of those who serve themselves and not God who made them. Great talents, gifts, abilities, and opportunities are great responsibilities. They are to be feared rather than coveted. Those who seek great things for themselves seek great damnation for their souls.

## Gospel Fire

*“I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I if it be already kindled?”* (v. 49) — The Son of God did not come to send peace on the earth but a sword. Nothing in all the world is more unifying than the gospel of the grace of God; but nothing is more divisive. And it is our Lord’s intention that it should be. The language of this passage in the original is very, very strong. John Trapp very accurately paraphrased it: “I am come to send fire on the earth. Let the fire kindle as soon as it will. I am contented. I know much good will come of it.”

The gospel of Christ is not a creed enshrined in a temple, but a fire burning in the soul. The gospel is not a theological system entombed in the brain, but a fire erupting in the heart. The gospel is not an icy system of ceremonies and rituals, but a fire burning in the earth.

Our Savior here tells us that the gospel is an ardent, fervent, flaming thing — a subject that stirs enthusiasm — a theme that

rouses intense devotion — something that excites men's souls — stirs them in the depths of their beings. The gospel does this both in those who love it and in those who hate it.

Men may be and often are indifferent about religion; but no one is indifferent about the gospel. It is a fire, the fire that our Lord Jesus came to send on the earth, the fire he was anxious to light by his death, resurrection, and exaltation, and by the out pouring of his Spirit upon all flesh.

*But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished*" (v. 50). How anxious our Lord was to suffer and die for us! How anxious he was to glorify the Father by his sacrifice as our Substitute! How anxious he was to redeem and save his people! How anxious he still is to bring us to glory. And as the direct result of his work at Calvary, there is a division among men. The gospel we preach is a fire in the earth, a dividing fire. Read verses 51-53.

“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.”

This is exactly what Paul tells us in Galatians 5:11. The cross of Christ is an offence to men. It always has been and always will be. The clear, simple preaching of the gospel, the message of the cross, the doctrine of the crucified Christ is an offence. It divides men. It divides friends. It divides families. It divides churches. Why? What is there in the gospel that causes such offence? The offence of the gospel is the fact that it is a declaration of salvation by grace alone, without works. — It offends man's dignity, because it addresses all men as sinners. — It offends man's wisdom, because it asserts that salvation comes only by divine revelation. Christ cannot be known by anyone, except he reveal himself to you and in you. — It offends man's pride, because it declares that the only way of salvation is substitution, particular

and effectual redemption, and imputed righteousness. — It offends man's love of self, because it demands surrender to Christ as Lord. — It offends man's sense of self worth, because it declares that salvation is by grace alone, distinguishing, free, sovereign, irresistible, effectual grace.

This gospel by which we are saved, this gospel which is always so divisive is the good news of heaven. It is "*how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,*" not the mere fact that Christ died, but "*H-O-W that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures*" (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). He died as our voluntary Surety, our justice satisfying Substitute, our effectual, sin-atonement Sacrifice. The gospel of Christ is the revelation of God as a just God and a Savior, the revelation of the righteousness of God in the exercise of saving grace (Isaiah 45:21; Romans 3:24-26).

## The Comparison

The Master says, "*I am come to send fire on the earth.*" — "*Is not my Word like a fire? Saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?*" (Jeremiah 23:29). How can the gospel be compared to fire. If you read the Book of God, you cannot avoid being struck with the extraordinary doctrine of the gospel revealed in its sacred pages. If ever the Lord God applies it to your heart, it will cease to be matters of curiosity, philosophy, and religious theory and debate. It will grab your soul, pierce your heart, and radically and forever change your life.

Perhaps that which first overwhelms the heart of a sinner in the experience of grace is the wondrous revelation of the love, mercy, and grace of God in Christ. What sweet, golden words these are: "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16; 1 John 3:1, 16; 4:9-10). Pause, O my soul, and think about the love of God! — Eternal, Electing Love! — Undeserved, Free, and Unconditional Love! — Redeeming, Sin-atonement Love! Everlasting, Unquenchable Love! — The Son

of God loved me, and gave himself for me. Imagine that!

This is the wondrous revelation of the gospel: — The love of God is revealed and known only in connection with the most astonishing display of justice, wrath, and severity imaginable — The sacrifice of God's own dear Son! If ever you come to know God, if ever God reveals his Son in you, if ever you learn the gospel, it will come to you like fire and ignite a fire in your soul. That is what Isaiah tells us he experienced (Isaiah 6:1-7)

The gospel of the grace of God is the sword of the Lord. And it is fire. It cannot sleep. The truths of the gospel — Blood Atonement — Free Justification — Complete Forgiveness — Salvation by Grace, are not just words and religious slogans. They are living principles. Like the breath in our lungs, they cannot be contained. They must break out. And when they do, they break out like fire in the earth. As soon as you confess the gospel of Christ in the ears of men, you will see the meaning of our Lord's words, "*I am come to send fire on the earth...and (with the fire) division.*"

But in Luke 12 our Lord Jesus is primarily talking about the preaching of the gospel. He who makes his ministers a flame of fire, puts fire in them. The fire in the preacher who is sent of God is not merely the fire of emotionalism, or the fire of brilliant intellect, or the fire of passionate oratory. It is something far greater. It is the power and influence of God the Holy Spirit upon his servants. The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven anoints all true evangelists, and is the true power and fire of every true gospel ministry. I will leave it to others to explain or debate that fact; but that is the fact.

God Almighty makes his ministers a flame of fire; and when they preach the gospel, the effect is always the same. It causes a division. Some believe and some believe not. And those who believe not always turn upon those who believe in a mad rage of fury, just as Cain did upon Abel.

The gospel, like fire, is wondrously pure. There is no mixture of impurity, error, or unrighteousness in it. It is free from every alloy of earth. And it is altogether spiritual. Christ, our Altar, is a

spiritual altar, not a carnal one. Our sacrifices to our God are spiritual sacrifices, offered from spiritual motives. We worship God in the Spirit.

The gospel, like fire, gives light. It gives the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It sheds light upon our hearts and teaches us about ourselves, exposing our sin. The gospel gives us the light of God's salvation, light about the world and time, and light about judgment and eternity.

The gospel, like fire, has a great testing quality. Nothing tests earthly things like fire. And nothing tests spiritual and heavenly things like the gospel (1 Corinthians 3:13). By that which is written in the Book of God, and by that alone we test and prove every doctrine, every ordinance, every religious practice, and every religious trend.

The gospel, like fire, is cheering and comforting. Those who have experienced it find that the cold of this world no longer pinches as it once did. We may be poor, but the gospel's fire takes away the chilliness of poverty. We may be sick, but the gospel gives our souls joy even in the body's decay. We may be slandered and neglected, but the gospel honors us in the sight of God. The gospel, wherever it is experienced in the heart, becomes a divine source of matchless consolation.

Fire is tremendously aggressive. So is the gospel of Christ. Take a few live coals, put them down in a pile of dry straw, and tell the fire, "I have given you a pile of straw to burn. Now burn, burn away to your heart's content. That straw is yours. But you can go no further. You must burn only this pile of straw. Give off no sparks or flames. Ignite nothing else." While you are talking so foolishly, you will soon find your barn in a heap of ashes. Fire is aggressive. It is never naturally contained. So it is with the gospel. It spreads as naturally as fire and licks up everything in its path, wherever the Wind of Heaven blows it.

As fire ultimately prevails, so the gospel of Christ shall prevail. It is clearly revealed in Scripture that as the world was once destroyed by water, it will a second time be destroyed by

fire. It is predestined that earth and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Fire will win the day. The oceans roll and roar, as it were, in great pride, and laugh at fire; but fire will lick up the waters of the sea with its tongues of flame. All the cities, and nations, and elements of the earth shall soon be consumed with fire.

So it is with the gospel. The seas of iniquity shall ultimate dissolve before our God and his Christ. The day shall soon come when the fire of the gospel shall make the whole world to be a burnt-offering unto the Lord God Most High.

One more comparison: — Like fire, the Gospel consumes (Psalm 39:4, 10-11). When the Lord God, by the application of the gospel, makes a man to know his end, the measure of his days, and how frail he is, he is consumed by the revelation. Blessed Savior, send your fire, and consume my unbelief, my pride and self-righteousness, consume my apathy and indifference, my love of the world, consume my heart, consume my life!

“Now, for the love I bear His name,  
What was my gain I count my loss;  
My former pride I call my shame,  
And nail my glory to His cross.  
Yes, and I must and will esteem  
All things but loss for Jesus’ sake:  
O may my soul be found in Him,  
And of His righteousness partake.”

# Chapter 84

## Discerning the Time

Luke 12:54-59

“And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when [ye see] the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. [Ye] hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, [as thou art] in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite” (Luke 12:54-59).

In these verses our Lord Jesus spoke specifically to the common people, the people who heard his doctrine and saw his miracles, those men and women who claimed to believe God, who claimed to be the people of God. Yet, he denounces them in exactly the same way as he had denounced the scribes, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, as hypocrites. Their teachers and preachers were blind men, but willfully blind as well. Both the religious leaders and the people who followed them, our Lord here denounces and rebukes as hypocrites.

## Our Responsibility

*First*, we must understand that it is our responsibility in this day, the day in which we live, to judge what is right by discerning the time in which we live (vv. 54-57). Our Master is not here suggesting that natural men have spiritual discernment. The Scriptures universally declare that the natural man is totally blind to all things spiritual and ignorant (1 Corinthians 2). What he does tell us is that his claims as the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world were so evidently true that the only reason the men and women of his generation did not acknowledge him as such, the only reason they did not judge what was right was the fact that they were not honest. They were hypocrites. The scepter of civil government had departed from Judah. Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week had been fulfilled. Elijah (John the Baptist) had come. And our Lord's miracles clearly attested his Messiahship.

Yet, the men and women of his day refused to acknowledge that which was manifestly true and right. Why? — They chose their religious customs and refused to give them up. They preferred the approval and acceptance of men to the approval and acceptance of God. They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. They loved religion, but hated God. They were unwilling to be separated from family and friend for the truth and glory of God.

We read in 1 Chronicles 12:32 that “*the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.*” Oh, how desperately we need such men today! Israel was passing through some troublesome, unsettling times. Critical issues had to be faced and dealt with. At a time when the cause and kingdom of God was under assault, the men of Issachar understood the times and stepped forward. They knew what had to be done, and they did it. I repeat, — we desperately need such men today.

Let us judge, discern, and seek to understand the times in which we live. I ask only that we read the Book of God. In the light of the plain statements of Holy Scripture, I assert that we are living in perilous times of Apostasy, divine judgment, and

spiritual darkness, such as the world has never seen before (Romans 1:18-32; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-16; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Revelation 20:1-8).

These are days of horrid apostasy. These are times of unparalleled evil, moral degeneracy, political corruption, and spiritual darkness. These are times of horrible indifference and spiritual lukewarmness. These are times of universal compromise. These are times of ambiguity and tolerance toward everything abominable, and utter intolerance for the truth and glory of God.

What does this day require of us? What do these present, perilous times demand of you and me? Times like these demand of God's people a bold, uncompromising, unflinching adherence to the singular authority of Holy Scripture, a distinct and decided, untiring declaration of gospel doctrine, and faithfulness, dedication and sacrifice for the cause of Christ. Times like these demand of us a clear recognition of our most important priorities and our most weighty responsibilities, and a diligent watchfulness over our own souls.

This is God's day and these are God's times. Let there be no mistake about that fact. This is the day God has made for us. What a great day in which to serve him! I would rather live in this day than any other. Never was there a day that provided the church of God with greater needs, greater opportunities, and greater means of usefulness than we have at our fingertips.

## Day of Grace

Now, I want you to look at verses 58 and 59 and learn that this is the day of grace and salvation. If you are wise, you will make it your business to be delivered from your adversary before you meet your Judge. Today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow will be too late. The Lord Jesus here compares us to a man on his way to meet the magistrate, the judge, with an adversary. You and I are on our way to meet the God of Glory on his great white throne judgment seat. The adversary walking with us is God's holy, condemning law. If we are not delivered from the claims of

this adversary before we meet God in judgment, we must forever be cast into hell.

The only way we can ever appease this adversary is by a mighty Advocate, who has a payment, a sacrifice by which he is and must be satisfied. That Advocate and Sacrifice is the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-6:2; 1 John 2:1-2; 4:9-10; Romans 8:1; Galatians 3:13-14; Colossians 2:12-15; 1 Peter 3:18). Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be reconciled to God. The time is short. Judgment is at hand. — “*We pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.*”

# Chapter 85

## A Word from Our God about Human Tragedy

### Luke 13:1-5

“There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1-5).

On April 19, 1995 Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols bombed the federal building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, indiscriminately murdering 168 people. Our nation was shocked. Just a few days after that, my wife and I were in Oklahoma City. I drove by the site of the bombing. I cannot describe the sense of numbness, rage, and frustration I felt as I reflected upon the cowardly act of those murderers and their crime against our nation. Even more than that, I was (and still am) filled with hurt for those families so devastated by the crime.

On April 20, 1999, two teenage boys walked into Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado and murdered twelve other students and a teacher. Again, our nation was shocked.

On September 11, 2001, our nation suffered the mass murder of 3000 people. Across the United States, citizens watched in horror as cowardly terrorists in hijacked planes crashed into the Pentagon, World Trade Center, and a field in Pennsylvania. What pain the families of those who died in that assault of religious

maniacs must live with for the rest of their lives!

Added to the pain caused by such senseless slaughters is the insinuation by many that these acts of inexplicable human cruelty were also acts of divine judgment upon those who died, as though they were sinners above the rest of us.

Not only are such events as these, which are so much on our minds as a nation, so alarming that they make our blood boil, they are horrors that so astound the mind that (try as we may) we have no ability to explain them. The sudden death which has fallen on the sons of men baffles human reason. We have, in recent years, almost come to expect another report of such barbaric deeds every time we turn on the radio or the television or open a newspaper.

Yet, we must not imagine that such things are new. We must not imagine, as many do, that these things are the inevitable consequences of our racially and culturally diverse society, or that they are events beyond the reach of divine wisdom and the control of divine providence.

Luke 13:1-5 tells us otherwise. The Galileans, like those in the terrorist attack of 9/11, were slaughtered by the senseless rage of a cruel man with the power, money, and the means to commit mass murder. Remember those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell were suddenly ushered out into eternity by the crushing weight of a falling tower.

These events may seem much less significant to us; but you can be certain they were not less significant to the families who lost their loved ones, than the events in Oklahoma, Colorado, and New York. These things are written in the Book of God for us that we may learn to walk with our God in the face of woe. Let us never imagine that God's providence has become lax. Sudden death is a part of life in this sin cursed earth. There always have been and always will be (for as long as the earth shall stand) such tragedies for men to face. As God's children in this world, in the face of such events that shake our society to its very foundations, we must not be shaken, or even appear to be shaken. Our God is still on his throne. Let us, therefore, walk through this world of

woe, even through this valley of the shadow of death confident and free of fear. God has not given up the reins of the universe. He has not taken off his hand from the helm of the ship. He is still in total control of all things, at all times, in all places. I want grace to trust him and honor him. Don't you? This is his promise to those who do: — *"His soul shall dwell at ease"* (Psalm 25:13).

It matters not who or what the instrument may be (Timothy McVeigh, Terry Nichols, street thugs, or Islamic thugs), that which takes men, women, and children out of this world is the hand of our God. It is God and God alone who kills and makes alive as he will. Sometimes he does so in such sudden, glaring displays that the whole world is shocked by his work.

### A Word of Caution

*First*, I want to give you a word of caution. We must never assume, as self-righteous men always do, that those who experience great tragedy and suffer great loss are being punished for their sins, as though they were greater sinners than we are. Such arrogant, self-righteous assumptions are as inexcusable as the deeds of wicked men, by whom such acts of terror are executed. I say to you, as our Master did to those who made such a proud assumption, *"Suppose ye that those who have suffered such tragedies are sinners above all the rest of us, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."*

Without question, God does judge men for sin, visiting the iniquities of men upon them, their families and their nation. Without question, ours is a nation and a generation under the judgment of God, judgment we have heaped upon ourselves by willful rebellion. But it is not within the realm of our ability to know when or for whom sudden death comes by divine judgment.

Often God brings death to his people suddenly, unexpectedly as an act of great mercy and grace.

*"The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart:*

and merciful men *are* taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil *to come*. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, *each one walking in his uprightness*” (Isaiah 57:1-2).

For the believer, death is never an act of divine judgment, an act of God’s anger. The believer’s death is always precious in the sight of the Lord. It is totally irrelevant how I die, where I die, when I die, or what the instrument of my death may be. The only thing that matters is that I die “*in the Lord*” redeemed, forgiven, justified, and accepted. — “*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*” (Psalms 116:15). Everything about the prospect of death is, for God’s elect, joyful (John 14:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Revelation 14:13).

When I have breathed my final breath  
And dropped this robe of flesh in death,  
When my appointed work is done  
And my allotted time is gone,  
Don't stand around my grave and cry.  
I'll not be there. I did not die.

My Savior came to call me home,  
And I with Him to heav'n have gone!  
Now I am free from sin and pain;  
And with the glorified I reign!  
Don't stand around my grave and cry.  
I'm glorified! I did not die!

Seated with Jesus on His throne,  
Glorified by what He has done,  
I am a trophy of His grace.  
Rejoicing, I behold His face.  
Don't stand around my grave and cry.  
I am with Christ! I did not die!

My body lies beneath the clay,  
Until the resurrection day.  
In that day when Christ comes again,  
Body and soul unite again!

Don't stand around my grave and cry.  
Rejoice with me! I did not die!

## A Word of Warning

Next, our Savior gives us this word of warning: — “*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish!*” You and I shall soon be cut off from the earth and ushered into eternity. Are you prepared to die? Am I? There is but one way for you and me to be prepared to die, to meet God in judgment. We must repent. Should you ask me, “What is repentance?” I would answer briefly that true repentance involves at least these three things:

1. Holy Spirit Conviction (John 16:8-11),
2. Faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-10, and
3. Turning to God (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10; Philippians 3:3-14).

But we must never imagine, as all the deluded will-worshippers of this world universally assert, that repentance is an act of man’s imaginary “free will”, by which he wins God’s favor. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The repentance spoken of by our Lord Jesus Christ, the repentance taught throughout the Word of God, is the work and gift of God wrought in chosen, redeemed, called sinners by his omnipotent, effectual, saving operations of grace. All the persons of the Godhead are engaged in the gracious work of creating repentance in his chosen.

1. God the Father pledged himself to give it, (Ezekiel 36:24-27).
2. God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has been “*exalted as a Prince and a Savior for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins*” (Acts 5:31).
3. And GOD the Holy Ghost is the “*spirit of grace and supplication*” poured out upon every redeemed sinner at the appointed time of love, causing every heaven born soul to “*look unto him whom they have pierced, and mourn*” (Zechariah 12:10).

Repentance is not a condition qualifying sinners for grace, but an evidence of grace bestowed. It is not the cause, but the effect. Unless the Lord God works this work in us, enabling us and effectually causing us to turn to him, just like those described here by Luke, *“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish!”*

# Chapter 86

## The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

Luke 13:6-9

“He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down” (Luke 13:6-9).

If we would understand this parable correctly, it must be read in the context of verses 1-5. Read in its context, it is obvious that this parable was addressed by our Lord to the Jewish nation. God gave the Jewish people great privileges and advantages, by which they should have known and served him, by which they should have known and believed the Lord Jesus Christ. They and they alone had all the privileges of divine revelation. They professed to be the people of God. But the very things that should have been their salvation became their ruin — their religion! Because they refused God’s revelation, the Lord God cut them down in judgment and cast them off (Romans 11).

Year after year, for three years, the Lord Jesus walked among them, showed himself by miracle after miracle, told them plainly who he is, and taught in their temple and synagogues. Yet, they despised him, rejected him, and refused to believe him. At last, he left them to themselves, utterly desolate (Matthew 23:37-38).

## Addressed to Us

But it is a very grave mistake to imagine, as many do, that that is the end of our Lord's purpose in this parable. This parable is specifically addressed to you and me. Its intent is the awakening of all who enjoy the means of grace and the privilege of hearing the gospel, professing to be his people. May God give us grace to hear the parable as though it had just come from our Lord's lips and was spoken directly to us. As C. H. Spurgeon wrote, "The parable is so simple that it needs no explanation, and therefore our Lord Jesus has not given any."

## God's Vineyard

The gospel church is God's garden and vineyard. That is the picture the Lord God gives of his church and kingdom by the prophet Isaiah.

"Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for

judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry” (Isaiah 5:1-7).

Because the Lord God has given us the privilege of sitting under the sound of the gospel, it is our responsibility to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:1). Yet, many who hear the gospel faithfully preached to them are yet without fruit toward God. You will notice in the parable that the man who owned the vineyard looked for fruit (singular) on the fig tree, not fruits (plural).

The fruit God looks for in men is faith in Christ, nothing else (Acts 16:31; Mark 16:16; John 3:16-19, 36; Romans 10:9-13). This fruit is not the produce of man’s imaginary free will, but the fruit of God’s free grace in Christ, the fruit of the Spirit, the gift and operation of God the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; Colossians 2:12).

Many there are who hear the gospel and even profess faith in Christ, but make for themselves a refuge of lies that will soon fall upon them and crush them down into hell. Professing they believe on the Lord Jesus, they look to their baptism, their church membership, their good works, the good opinion of others about them, their knowledge, or their religious experience to give them peace and hope before God. Soon, that refuge of lies will be swept away (Isaiah 28:14-20). Judgment is God’s strange work (Isaiah 28:21); but he will perform it. In the eyes of proud men, it may appear to be a strange act for the God of all grace; but it will be the act of God that casts unbelieving sinners headlong into eternal hell.

## A Set Time

There is a period of time set and determined by God beyond which he will not tolerate the insult of your obstinate unbelief. — *“Behold today is the day of salvation!”* Many seek to avoid every thought of personal responsibility before God. Many there are who imagine that the assertion of man’s responsibility to believe the gospel is a repudiation of divine sovereignty. But the Scriptures are crystal clear in this matter. If you perish in

unbelief, all the blame is yours. If you are saved, all the praise is God's. Unbelief is man's work. The gift of faith is God's work.

Is it possible for a man or women to so willfully and persistently rebel against God and deny the claims of Christ in the gospel that God will refuse to be gracious to them? Is it possible for men and women to sin away the day of grace, while they still go on living in this world? That is precisely the message of this parable.

Listen to what God himself says about the matter. God says to you and me, "*Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.*" Surely, we cannot mistake the meaning of those words. Anyone in all the world who, hearing the gospel of Christ, repents and believes shall be saved. If you will turn to him, if you will call upon him, if you will believe him, Christ will save you. But if you refuse to hear and believe God, be warned. God will not take it lightly. The Lord God says...

"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hands and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsels and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as a desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own ways and be filled with their own devices...But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from the fear of evil" (Proverbs 1:23-33).

We have God's own word for it. If we obey his call in the gospel, he will save us. If we despise his calls, if we persistently stop our ears to the voice of God in the gospel, he will pass upon us an irreversible sentence of eternal ruin, even while we live upon the earth. And when he throws the impenitent soul into hell,

the wicked will forever eat of the fruit of their own ways. They will at last get what they asked for when they said “I want nothing to do with Christ.”

There are many ways in which men and women are called and warned by God. God calls all men to himself in creation. — “For the invisible things of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). God’s being, power, and wisdom are plainly revealed to all men in creation’s handiwork.

No one can honestly deny that fact. God calls all men to himself by conscience as well. “*The law is written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness*” (Romans 2:14-15). Your conscience is God’s witness of himself in your soul.

God warns all men of judgment to come by his acts of providence. Every time you see pictures of starving children in Ethiopia, every time you get sick, every time you have an automobile accident or a close brush with death, every time you visit a hospital or a funeral parlor, God is speaking to you by his acts of providence. He is saying to you, “*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*” (Hebrews 9:27). He is saying to you, Sinner, “*prepare to meet thy God*” (Amos 4:12).

And God calls men and women to faith in Christ and warns them of his justice and sure judgment to come by the preaching of the gospel. He sends his servants into the world with this great commission: — “*Go ye into all the worlds and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*” (Mark 16:15-16). If you obey God’s call and trust the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall be saved. If you refuse, you shall be damned. — “*Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart*” (Hebrews 3:7-8).

Yet, the Word of God makes it clear that, there are many who can and do refuse God’s gracious warnings and earnest calls to repentance. They willfully sin against the light God has given them, harden their hearts, and refuse to hear his voice. And, when they do, God shuts the door of mercy against them! Men and

women were still alive when God shut the door of the ark. And I dare say that there are many walking on earth today against whom God has shut the door of salvation and grace. For them, the day of grace is gone. They cannot be saved. They must perish. God help you. Be wise. Do not trifle with the gospel (Luke 13:24-25; Jeremiah 7:16; Hosea 4:17; Matthew 13:12-16; 2 Corinthians 2:15-17).

## Judgment Sure

The judgment of God is sure. Barren, fruitless souls are not only useless themselves, they are a hindrance to others. They cumber the ground, spoil the soil and, like the Pharisees, not only refuse to enter the strait gate, but prevent others from entering.

Faithful pastors, faithful gospel preachers, earnestly intercede with God, laboring earnestly for the souls of men and seeking God's mercy on their behalf, that he might spare even the barren soul that deserves to be cut down (v. 8; Joel 2:17; Romans 9:3; 10:1); but you must believe. You must trust the Lord Jesus Christ. The only thing that will save you from the axe of divine justice is that the God of all grace may so work in you by his Spirit that he brings forth in you, by the new creation of grace, the fruit of faith in Christ. Yes, this faith is the gift and work and operation of God the Holy Spirit; but this faith is your responsibility. You must believe on the Son of God. If you believe, salvation is yours.

Every soul without the fruit of faith toward God, like the barren fig tree, shall be destroyed. There is a law in the Book of Deuteronomy that relates to this. The barren, fruitless tree is fit for nothing but fire. You can only use a fig tree for two things: food or fuel. It is good for nothing else (Deuteronomy 20:19-20). Whether you believe or believe not, whether you are saved or damned, our God does well, and we will acquiesce in his goodness (Romans 3:3-4). God's purpose will be accomplished. God's elect will be saved. God's glory will be manifest. And God's justice will be vindicated.

# Chapter 87

## Cured at Last!

Luke 13:10-17

“And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him” (Luke 13:10-17).

Our Lord’s miracles were intended to be types of his mercy and grace, confirming his claims as the Messiah, the Deliverer of Israel, the Son of God, our Redeemer and our King. When he healed the ailments of men’s bodies, he was showing that he has power to cure the maladies of our souls. When he raised the dead, he was showing us that he, who is the resurrection and the life,

has power to give spiritual, eternal life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. When he multiplied the loaves and fishes, gathered fish into the empty nets of his toiling disciples, and caused a coin to be found in the mouth of a fish, he was teaching us that he has the power to provide our every need in this world. And when he spoke peace to the troubled sea and walked across the water to his disciples, he was teaching us that he who rules the world rules the storms of our lives, and when our souls are in trouble, he will come to us to comfort us.

Whenever we read of miracles performed by our Lord Jesus Christ, the believing heart should always see in the miracle a message of mercy. Our Lord, by leaving us the record of these things, is saying to us, “As I have worked glorious things upon the earth in the days of my flesh, I will surely work even more glorious things for you in my exaltation.”

As our Lord Jesus Christ met this poor woman in the synagogue and raised her up from her long and painful infirmity, he now meets sinners in the assembly of his saints and raises those who are bowed down by his almighty grace. His name is Jehovah-rapha. He says, “*I am the LORD that healeth thee*” (Exodus15:26). I hold this woman before you, whose name I do not know, as an example of what the Lord Jesus Christ can do, and in every age and place does for poor, needy sinners such as we are.

## Her Condition

First, the Holy Spirit calls our attention to this woman’s condition. — “*And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself...And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?*” (vv. 11 and 16).

On the Sabbath day the Lord Jesus could always be found in the synagogue, or in the temple teaching. He was in his element in the house of God. And he was most happy when he was

declaring to men the things of God. In order to confirm the doctrine he taught and to illustrate it, he performed this great miracle of mercy. There is no other case exactly like it mentioned in the Scriptures. Therefore, Luke calls our attention to it with the word, "*Behold!*"

We are not told precisely what was wrong with this woman, only that she was "*bowed together,*" that her condition was caused by Satan binding her, that she had been bowed together for 18 years, and that, "*she could in no wise lift herself up.*" She was very sick; and her infirmity was not only physical, but spiritual as well. Her outward appearance was an index of her inward torment. The appearance of her body was a picture of her soul. She was bowed together. Commenting on this passage, Spurgeon wrote, "Spiritual deformity assumes many forms, and each form is painful to look upon."

The next time you go to the house of God, try to picture in your mind what the assembly might look like if every person present appeared outwardly to be what he is inwardly, as this woman did. Suppose that your physical appearance were a reflection of your inward state. The place would be truly pitiful to look upon. Over against the wall you might see a dead corpse. On the other side you might look with shock upon a poor leper. In another place you might see a paralyzed man with trembling faith. Sitting on one side of you might be a woman with fits of passion and despair, on the other side a man with flashes of fever and chills, and behind you a person with a convulsing heart, torn between heaven and earth.

Every gospel church might rightly be called "*Bethel*" (House of God) and "*Bethesda*" (House of Mercy, or House of Healing). Assembled together God's elect are a multitude of sick folk, poor, lame, broken, halt, maimed, and impotent. But in the house of God the Lord Jesus is in our midst. He is present in mercy to relieve the miseries of his chosen.

This poor woman in our text was probably unnoticed in the crowd. Being bowed together, she was dwarfed in size. It appears that she regularly attended the synagogue. So the people there had become hardened to her condition. They paid her no

attention. But the Son of God saw her, had compassion on her and healed her. And here she is held up as an example of grace.

This woman's condition is a picture of every lost sinner. She was bowed together (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Blessed is the person who is bowed together in heart by reason of sin! She had been in this horrible deformity for a long, long time. Her misery was the work of Satan. And "*she could in no wise lift herself up*" (Jeremiah 13:23). She was a prisoner in her own body, a prisoner of sickness, but a prisoner of hope. Though she could not lift herself up, she was in the presence of One who could lift her up. And she had hope because he had lifted up many before her.

- The Leper (Luke 5:12-13).
- The Paralyzed Man (Luke 5:18-26).
- The Unclean Multitudes (Luke 6:18-19).
- The Centurion's Servant (Luke 7:1-10).
- The Widow's Son (Luke 7:11-17).
- The Demon Possessed Women (Luke 8:2-3).
- The Gadarene (Luke 8:26-36).
- Jairus' Daughter (Luke 8:41-42).
- The Woman with the Issue of Blood (Luke 8:43-48).
- The Ruler of the Synagogue's Daughter (Luke 8:49-56).
- As Many as had need of healing (Luke 9:11).
- The Demon Possessed Child (Luke 9:42).

This woman may have reasoned in her own mind, "If this Man, who has healed so many others, is pleased to do so, he can heal me too!" I am not certain about what she may have thought, but I tell you this with certainty: — The Lord Jesus is able to save unto the uttermost all who come to God by him.

This woman's condition is also a picture of many of God's saints in this world. Without question, she was a believer, a saved woman, one who worshipped and served the true and living God, though she was sorely afflicted in the providence of God by the hand of Satan. We know she was a believer, a child of God because there is no mention here of her being forgiven. In other places, those healed were also forgiven. Apparently she was already forgiven. And our Lord tells us that she was "*a daughter of Abraham,*" an Israelite indeed.

Many of Abraham's sons and daughters, many of God's saints in this world are like this poor woman, "*bowed together,*" being afflicted and bound, in a sense, by Satan, having "*a spirit of infirmity.*" She had lost all her natural brightness and cheerfulness. No doubt, as a girl she was as smiling, sparkle-eyed and happy as anyone. But gradually there crept over her body an infirmity, which dragged her face downward, until at last she was bowed together. For eighteen long years, she had walked with her face toward the earth, as if she were looking for a grave. It had been eighteen years since she had seen the noonday sun, looked upon the singing birds in the trees, or beheld the star-lit sky.

She was bowed down with a spirit of infirmity. Are you like this poor soul, perpetually bowed down? Perhaps you remember happier days; but now you are bowed together in the melancholy spirit of infirmity. It has been a long, long time since you have been able to enter into sweet communion with God, behold the face of your beloved Savior, or enjoy the peace, comfort, and joy of faith. In your inmost soul you pine for him whose presence is your happiness.

“Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the sweet refreshing view  
Of Jesus in His Word?”

What blissful hours I then enjoyed,  
How sweet their memory still!  
But they have left an aching void  
The world can never fill!”

This woman, being bowed together, was bowed toward herself, bowed toward that which is most depressing. By some unexplainable mystery, depression breeds depression, grief multiplies, and a melancholy spirit is a legion in number. And the more you are bowed down to look to yourself, the more bowed down you will be.

We never find peace, assurance, and joy in Christ by looking to ourselves. Our Savior never admonishes us to look to ourselves, but to him. Religion and the devil tell us to look inwardly to ourselves. The Lord Jesus commands us always and only to look to him (Isaiah 45:22; Hebrews 12:1-2). Any religion that sets you looking to yourself is nothing but a snare of Satan.

Next, we are told that this poor soul “*could in no wise lift up herself.*” No need to blame her for her condition. One of her older sisters may have scolded her for her condition, when she began to stoop, saying, “Sister, you must not give in to your feelings. Straighten up, or you will become stooped and deformed.” What good advice some people can give!

This poor woman was bound by Satan. And when Satan binds the soul, it is as truly bound as when a man snares an eagle and binds it. This woman was bound to herself! All the advice, counsel, and preaching in the world could not lift her up. And she could not lift herself up, though she wanted to do so with all her heart. Her free will could not change her condition!

Worst of all, she had been bowed down for eighteen years. — Eighteen years! That is a long, long time. Eighteen years of happiness fly by more swiftly than we are able to fathom. Eighteen years of happiness is a short span of time. But eighteen years of misery, eighteen years of pain, eighteen years of being bowed down, who can measure that? Eighteen long years, each year dragging twelve miserable months behind it, each month pulling four heavy weeks, each week loaded with seven gloomy days, and each day loaded down with twenty-four grueling, painful, lonely hours! What grief! This woman had been in the bonds of the devil for eighteen years, bowed together!

Reader, are you like this poor woman? Have you been bowed

down in spirit for a long, long time? Perhaps your inner despondency, your soul's constant unrest is an affliction no one can understand. If you are such, take hope. — This woman's cure came in a moment. The chain, which it took Satan eighteen years to forge, the Son of God broke in an instant!

Do not forget that though she was in such a miserable condition for such a long, long time, all the while she was a child of Abraham. Her heart was right with God.

### Her Conduct

Second, the Spirit of God shows us what this poor soul did. — *“And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself”* (vv. 10-11).

This poor woman, bowed together as she was in body and in spirit, was in the house of prayer on the Sabbath day. And it was while she was there in the house of prayer that she found the liberty she craved in her soul. For eighteen years she had come to the house of God in excruciating pain and gone home again in torment. But on this day, she was cured. Mercy was found in the house of prayer.

There was nothing about her life and nothing in her spiritual condition to give her comfort. And she could not lift herself up. But she could go to the house of God. She could worship God. Even in her misery she honored God. And God always honors those who honor him. She came to the house of prayer, because everything she needed was to be found there. The Lord was there. His Word was there. His people were there. His instruction was to be found there. His mercy was to be found there. I can almost hear her singing Psalm 122, as she skipped and danced home that day!

This woman, who might have been reasonably excused for not attending the worship of God, made it her business to be in the house of God on the day of public worship. What is your

excuse for neglecting it?

## Her Cure

Third, the Holy Spirit tells us how the Lord Jesus healed this poor soul of her infirmity. — “*And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God*” (vv. 12-13). Look at how Luke describes this woman’s cure. She had been bound by Satan for eighteen years. But Christ came to set her free. And this is how he did it.

“*When Jesus saw her, he called her to him.*” When he called her, he spoke to her and spoke effectually, causing her disease to flee from her. — “*Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.*” Then “*he laid his hands on her,*” his almighty, tender, nail pierced hands! And, “*immediately she was made straight.*” Man can never make straight that which God has made crooked. But the Son of God can easily make straight what sin and Satan have made crooked. As soon as she was cured, she “*glorified God!*”

Shackled by a heavy burden  
'Neath a load of guilt and shame  
Then the hand of Jesus touched me  
And now I am no longer the same.

He touched me, Oh, He touched me  
And oh the joy that floods my soul  
Something happened and now I know  
He touched me and made me whole

Since I met the blessed Savior  
And since He cleansed and made me whole  
I will never cease to praise Him. —  
I'll shout it while eternity roll.

Oh He touched me! Oh He touched me!  
And oh what a joy that floods my soul!

Something happened and now I know,  
He touched me and made me whole!

The Lord permitted Satan to afflict the child of his love for eighteen years, so that she might glorify him forever. Her deep sorrow, when it was over, made her song most sweet.

## Her Conflict

No sooner was one trial over than another began. As soon as this woman was healed, she was involved in great conflict with a self-righteous, religious hypocrite. This man was upset, because this woman was healed on the sabbath day! — *“And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day”* (v. 14).

The sabbath day was a day of rest. And now, for the first time in eighteen years, this poor soul was at rest. But this legalist could not stand it. Legalism is hard. The legalist is more concerned for laws, rules, customs, and days than he is for the needs of human beings. Legalism is haughty. The legalist is always proud and self-righteous. Legalism is hypocrisy. Every man who pretends to live by the law of God is a hypocrite. Legalists always lower the standard of the law, which is perfection, perfect holiness, perfect obedience. By lowering the law’s standard to themselves, they vainly imagine that they are holier than others.

## Her Comfort

The Lord Jesus tenderly comforted his beloved child by three things: (1.) He answered her adversary (v. 15). (2.) He assured her of her acceptance (v. 16). And (3.) he graciously used her to be an instrument for the glory of God (v. 17).

“The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or

his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him” (13:15-17).

When our Lord gets done, all his enemies and ours shall forever be ashamed. In that great, eternal day all his people shall forever rejoice in the glorious things that have been done by him. And you and I, sinners saved by his grace, shall be named among those glorious things done by him, for which he shall be praised forever!

# Chapter 88

## Two Instructive Parables

### Luke 13:18-21

“Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (Luke 13:18-21).

In these four verses our Lord Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard seed and a leaven hidden in three measures of meal. Our Savior was a great story teller. He constantly used parables, told stories to illustrate and enforce his doctrine. He never used spell-binding oratory, intellectual argument, philosophy, logic, or theological history to teach the gospel. He deliberately spoke in plain, simple language to clearly set forth and illustrate gospel truth. That is the kind of preaching that should be cultivated among God’s servants (1 Corinthians 2:3-5; Mark 4:33-34).

When the Lord Jesus preached, he always preached in the plainest, simplest manner imaginable. He who is the embodiment of wisdom and knowledge never used complicated words and phrases. He never once referred to the original language, or even defined a word. He did not use words that required definition. Instead, he told stories and illustrated the truths he taught by parables.

In contrast with today’s preaching, our Lord’s example of

preaching speaks volumes. He preached in such a way that people understood what he preached. He never tried to impress his hearers with how smart a man he was or how much he knew. He did not display knowledge. He taught knowledge. There is a huge difference. Those who follow the Master's example do not try to impress men. They instruct men.

Our Master taught with plainness and simplicity. He did not preach what he could not illustrate; and when he was finished, the people who heard him understood what he had said. Our Savior taught with knowledge and understanding (Jeremiah 3:15). He knew exactly what they needed, and what they could bear, and taught them accordingly. The Son of God expounded all things to his disciples. He kept back nothing from them. He expounded to them all the Word of God. Faithful men follow his example.

The word "*parable*" is the same word that is translated proverb in other places. Solomon's wise sayings and instructive similitudes are called proverbs, or parables, by which he taught us wisdom. — "*Behold, a greater than Solomon is here!*" By his parables, he teaches us wisdom. — "*Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*"

Speaking in parables our Lord fulfilled the prophecy of the Old Testament scriptures (Psalm 78:2). And the matter, the subject, and the theme of these parables, Matthew tells us, are "*things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.*" The gospel of Christ and the purposes of God toward the Gentile world were wrapped up in the Old Testament by the types and shadows of the law, which have now been fulfilled by Christ, in whom God has revealed himself and made known his grace.

The Master's reason for speaking in parables is explained in Matthew 13:9-10. As the mighty, sovereign God of heaven and earth, he exercises his sovereign mercy, giving grace to whom he will, and making a clear distinction among men. To some he reveals his Word. From others he hides the meaning of his words. That is his prerogative as God (Matthew 11:25-26; 20:15; Exodus 33:19).

In the two instructive parables of the mustard seed and the leaven our Savior shows us what we may expect to be the result of gospel preaching throughout the ages of time.

## Mustard Seed

*First*, let us learn the parable of the mustard seed.

“Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it” (vv. 18-19).

Remember, parables are common, familiar earthly illustrations of spiritual, heavenly truths. In this case the parable is drawn from a commonly used proverbial expression during the days of our Lord’s earthly ministry. The parable of the grain of mustard seed is designed to teach us never to despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:6-10).

## Holy Scripture

The first thing I want to show you from this parable is the veracity of Holy Scripture. Ignorant men who think themselves wise, reprobate men who think themselves spiritual, pass judgment upon the Word of God. They claim to be Christians, claim to be people of faith, and claim to honor Christ, while denying the veracity of the Bible. Not long ago, I heard a man in an interview with ABC News say, “I believe the Bible; but I don’t take it word for word.” A woman, in the same segment said, “I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God; but I do not think you have to take it all literally.” Regrettably, those comments fairly well represent the opinions of most who profess to be Christians in our day.

In this day of spiritual darkness and perversion there is almost a universal abandonment of belief in the verbal, plenary inspiration of God’s holy, inerrant Word. Rejecting the veracity

and consequently the authority of Holy Scripture, men and women everywhere are turning to necromancy, astrology, and sorcery for *spiritual* counsel and aid. Long ago John Hazelton wrote, “Satan assumes the garb of an angel of light and his deceptions in this disguise are deadly.”

“And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? (To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them” (Isaiah 8:19-20).

Frequently, those who think they are smarter than God point to this parable to show that our Savior was either ignorant or misinformed, because he spoke of the mustard seed as the smallest of all seeds and of the mustard plant as a tree. Those who make such judgments are ignorant and misinformed. When our Lord said that the mustard seed is “*the smallest of all seeds in the earth*, he was not talking about all seeds without exception, but all the seeds a man sows in his garden. Though we usually think of mustard plants as bushy, leafy plants, there is a variety of mustard that grows into a pretty good size tree like plant, sort of like a banana tree in size. We must never allow men, with their imaginary proofs of inaccuracies in the Bible, shake our faith in the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

## Faith

*Second*, the mustard seed was used by our Lord as an illustration of our faith in him. Though it is never mentioned in the Old Testament, many varieties of mustard plants grew in abundance in and around Palestine. Some grew in the wild. Others were cultivated for various purposes. In the New Testament it is mentioned only by our Savior. Twice he compares true faith to a grain of mustard seed (Matthew 17:14-21; Luke 17:3-6). Mustard seed is mentioned only five times in the Word of God. When it is used to illustrate faith, as in Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6, it teaches us four specific things about the character of true faith.

1. True, saving faith begins as a very small thing — A Grain of Mustard Seed. The fact is true believers always recognize that their faith is a small, very small thing. We often look upon our brothers and sisters in Christ as being men and women of great faith; but anyone who thinks he has great faith probably has no faith at all.

2. It is not the greatness of our faith, but the greatness of our God and Savior, the Object of our faith, that gives it merit, power, and efficacy.

Far too many have faith in their faith, which is to say they have faith in themselves. We must never imagine that there is some mystical power to faith. The power of our faith is Christ, the Object of our faith. It is not our faith that moves the mountain of our sins or plucks up the sycamore tree of trouble; but the blood of Christ and the power of Christ, who is the Object of our faith. The question is not, “How much faith do I have;” but “What is the object of my faith?” Great faith in an idol is as useless as spitting in the wind; but faith, even as a grain of mustard seed, in the God of glory is mighty, effectual, saving faith.

3. With God, nothing is impossible; and therefore, “Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mk. 9:23).

Nothing can stand in the way of, hinder, or defeat that man and those people who, being called of God, believe him. It was impossible for Egypt to destroy Israel, because Moses believed God. It was impossible for the Red Sea to stop the march of God’s elect, because Moses believed God. The walls of Jericho must fall. Joshua believed God. The land of Canaan must be possessed. Caleb believed God. The Philistine giant had to die, because David, defending the cause of God’s glory and his people, believed God. Jairus’ daughter had to live. He believed God. The centurion’s servant must rise. That centurion believed God. Our Savior was not lying when he said, “*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*” “*If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God.*”

4. Yet, nothing is more abominably wretched than the paralyzing effect of unbelief.

When the Lord Jesus came into his own land, among his own people, we read, “*He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief*” (Matthew 13:58). Just in proportion as we believe God, we experience his power and grace. Just in proportion as we believe him, we see his glory. Nothing is as costly as unbelief (Isaiah 48:16-19).

## The Church

*Third*, the parable of the mustard seed illustrates the growth of God’s church and kingdom in this world. The purpose of the parable is, as I said before, to teach us to never despise the day of small things. But it is also intended to assure us of the certain growth and blessedness of Christ’s church and kingdom in this world.

Like faith in the heart, the church and kingdom of God in this world began as a very small thing. The expression, “*as a grain of mustard seed*,” was a common, proverbial saying among the Jews, referring to anything small and insignificant. As a rule, God’s works in the world are always looked upon by men as trivial, insignificant things. Certainly, that is the way it was with the Church of the New Testament.

Those who were chosen to be the foundational apostles of Christ’s kingdom were poor, unlettered fishermen. He who is the Lord and Master of this Church, the King of this Kingdom, was a despised Nazarene, a crucified Jew. The doctrine proclaimed by this Church, the doctrine which they preached everywhere was the doctrine of grace, life, and eternal salvation by the merit and efficacy of a crucified Substitute. In the eyes of men nothing could have been less likely to be successful, nothing could have been more despicable, nothing could have been more offensive. Yet, this was God’s work, God’s Church, and God’s Kingdom.

God’s thoughts are not our thoughts; and his ways are not our ways. God almost always does things exactly opposite of what

we would, and of what we imagine he does. The gospel does not triumph all at once. The church and kingdom of God is not set up all at once, neither amongst us in the world, nor within us in our hearts.

The church of God sprang from a very small seed sown in the earth, a crucified Savior (John 12:24). God's works almost always begin in obscurity, with what appear to be insignificant things. The work of the gospel, the spread of God's church and kingdom is a gradual, but consistent thing. Like the grain of mustard seed sown in the ground, its growth is almost unobservable, but steady. As the full grown mustard seed is the greatest and largest of all herbs, so the church and kingdom of God shall, in the end of the world, be immeasurably great and large (Psalm 80:8-11). The number of God's elect shall be ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. Untold millions and billions of people shall inhabit heaven's glory with Christ!

Once planted, this Church and Kingdom grew into a great Kingdom. Our Lord's parable here was prophetic. Again, he was telling his disciples not to despise the day of small things. Though it appeared a small, despicable thing, like the mustard seed, the Lord here prophesied that his Church would become a great, large Kingdom. He said, "As the mustard plant grows to be the greatest of all herbs, so shall my church grow to be the greatest of all kingdoms."

So it has come to pass. It began to grow on the day of Pentecost. 3000 were born into his Kingdom on that day. The Church grew so rapidly that nothing can account for it except the finger of God. A few days after Pentecost, 5000 were added to the Church at once. Wherever God's servants went preaching the gospel, it proved to be the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:14-17). Today the Church of God is the greatest Empire the world has ever known; and it is not done growing yet. God still employs the same means today as he did in the beginning for the building of his Church — Gospel Preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21-31; Matthew 16:18). In spite of all the predictions of wicked men, in spite of all the foes without and all the treachery within, the

Church of God still progresses, the Kingdom of God still enlarges itself, — the mustard plant still grows!

## Believers

That which is true of the Church as a whole is true of each member of it. The beginnings of grace in the life of a believer are very small; but where there is life there is growth; and those who are born of God are grown by God. The more they grow, the smaller they appear in their own eyes. Yet, when God is finished with us, we shall at last be transformed into the very likeness of the Son of God!

## Influence

The *fourth* thing that is evident in this parable is this: The church and kingdom of God has a very ennobling, sanctifying influence upon the rest of the world. Though no one in the world knows it, and few in the Kingdom of God realize it, the Church and Kingdom of God has a profoundly sanctifying effect upon the rest of society. That is, at least in part, what is meant by the birds of the air flocking to and nesting in the mustard plant. The Church and Kingdom of God, like a great tree, provides shelter for the world and influences it for good. We have an example of what I am talking about in 1 Corinthians 7:14, where God the Holy Spirit tells us that, “the *unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband.*”

As in a home the unbelieving are sanctified by the believing in a moral sense, so in the world, the unbelieving are sanctified by the believing. Read your history books. Education did absolutely nothing to improve the moral condition of the Greek and Roman worlds. Plato and Aristotle made absolutely no impact upon society for moral good. That which has improved every society, every culture, every family, and every relationship under its influence is the gospel of Christ.

## Mixed Multitude

*Fifth*, in this parable of the mustard seed, our Lord reminds us again that the church and kingdom of God in this world is a mixed multitude. The fowls of the air also represent the mixed multitude in the visible Church and Kingdom of God in this world. The visible Church has always been inhabited by both the clean and the unclean. There is no such thing as a perfect Church in this world. Every true Church has within its fold both goats and sheep. It is a nesting place for birds clean and birds unclean. It is a garden enclosed; but a garden with wheat and tares growing side by side.

What are we to do about this? Nothing! Do not try to scare off the crows. If you do, you will drive away the red birds. Do not try to pull up the tares. You will pull up wheat every time. Never try to separate sheep from goats. We are not equipped for it. Only the Lord himself can distinguish the true from the false. It is his work to do the separating; and he will do it.

## The Leaven

Next, let us learn the parable of the leaven.

“And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.” (vv. 20-21).

This parable is misinterpreted by many. We are often told that the leaven refers to the ever-increasing evil of the world. But our Lord is not talking about the world. He is talking about “*the kingdom of heaven*.” He is talking about his Church. The parable of the leaven is very much the same in meaning as the parable of the mustard seed. It teaches us that the gospel prevails by degrees and works like leaven in the hearts of God’s elect.

“*A woman took leaven.*” — The woman, the weaker vessel, represents gospel preachers, who have the treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7).

The leaven was hidden in three measures of meal. The regenerate heart, like meal, is soft and pliable. Leaven will never work in corn, but only in ground meal. So the gospel has no effect upon the stony, unregenerate heart. It only works upon broken hearts that have been ground by the Holy Spirit in conviction.

Once the leaven is hidden in the dough, it works. So the word of God, hidden in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners by God the Holy Spirit, works and brings forth fruit. The change it works is gradual, but it works (Hebrews 4:12). God's work is like the growth of the mustard seed and the spread of leaven, so small and gradual in our eyes that it is almost unobservable. Let us never despise the day of small things. — But when he gets done...

“Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This *is* the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. Who *art* thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel *thou shalt become* a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone *thereof with* shoutings, *crying*, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel *with* those seven; they *are* the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:6-10).

## Chapter 89

# “Are there few that be saved?”

Luke 13:22-30

“And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last” (Luke 13:22-30).

Multitudes there are who, like the Jews of hold, have all the advantages and privileges of outward gospel ordinances and public worship, multitudes enjoy the practice of religion and a form of godliness, who never know the saving power of God’s omnipotent mercy. Multitudes keep up the exercises of religion with great diligence, who know nothing of God’s salvation. They

strive to enter into the kingdom of God; but it is in their own strength. They eat and drink in Christ's presence; and many hear Christ and him crucified faithfully preached, who perish without him. Others, scattered among the nations of the world, who never had such privileges, upon hearing the gospel, have the Lord Jesus revealed in them and believe. Such is the discrimination of grace that the last are made first and the first are made last.

I am of the firm and ever deepening conviction that most religious people are lost. Most of the people I preach to in churches throughout this country and around the world are yet in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. It is not as easy as you might suppose to find one who truly knows the Lord Jesus Christ. There are few who trust Christ, few who are committed to Christ, few who are in love with the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's elect, contrary to popular opinion, are not to be found in every church. It may well be true that there are few in any gospel church. In the last day multitudes, vast multitudes of religious men and women, who are absolutely sure they are saved, will hear the Son of God say, "*Depart from me,*" and shall be forever consigned to the torments of the damned (Matthew 7:21-23). — They believed the truth about Christ. — They professed faith in Christ. — They preached in the name of Christ. — They performed miracles in the name of Christ. — They performed many wonderful works in the name of Christ. — They had perfect peace, confidence, and assurance that they were saved, born of God, heirs of heaven, and eternal glory. — But they were lost, without God, without Christ, without hope. Any honest man who reads those three verses in Matthew 7 must be compelled to ask himself, "*Lord, is it I?*" As John Newton put it in one of his hymns...

'Tis a point I long to know,  
Oft it causes anxious thought,  
Do I love the Lord, or no,  
Am I his or am I not?

It is a fact plainly revealed in Holy Scripture that the vast majority of those who profess faith in Christ and think that all is well with their immortal souls are lost, in the broad road of

destruction, which leads to eternal ruin. Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ says to you and me, “*Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*” Let us make neither more nor less of this solemn exhortation than our Lord means by it. And the best way to determine what he means is to look into the context.

## A Striking Question

The Lord Jesus was making his way toward Jerusalem where he would lay down his life for his people. There he would make atonement for our sins by suffering all the horrid wrath of God in our room and stead unto death, satisfying the justice of God for us. As he went his way to Calvary, he taught the gospel. One day, as he walked in the streets teaching the multitudes around him, obviously, someone thought of what the Scriptures teach about divine election and concluded that since there were not many disciples following the Master, and God has only chosen some to be saved, there must be only a few who will be saved.

Satan commonly perverts precious, gospel doctrine into something hard in the minds of men, and takes that which ought to encourage sinners to trust Christ, and makes it a barrier before them. That seems to have been the case here. So one of those who walked with and heard the Lord Jesus raised this question: — “*Are there few that be saved?*”

It is likely that this question was asked by a Jew, and that the two parables illustrating the smallness of the kingdom’s beginning suggested it to him. The Jews extended their exclusive spirit even to their ideas of a world to come, so that they believed none but their chosen race would behold its glories. The questioner wanted the Savior to give his approval to this narrow Jewish spirit, or else to take a position which would subject him to the charge of being unpatriotic.

Whatever the man’s motive was in asking this question, the Lord Jesus answered his question with a very needful admonition: — “*Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able*” (v. 24).

What does it matter whether God's elect are few or many, if you are not one of them? The Master answered this man's question directly, urging him to make sure that he is in the number, however large or small it might be. Satan does not care if you discuss and debate the things of God twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week as long as you go on to hell without Christ. Multitudes go to hell talking about religion.

People like to poke fun at those of us who believe and preach the blessed, gospel doctrine of divine election, saying, "You folks believe that there are only a select few who will be saved." Well, yes, that is what we believe. Our Lord Jesus Christ said plainly, "*Many are called, but few are chosen*" (Matthew 22:14). Those are the words of God himself. That settles the question.

I know that in the end God's elect will be a multitude which no man can number, ten thousand time ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. Who can tell how many elect infants God has mercifully taken to glory in his acts of judgment upon their ungodly parents? Yet, at any one time, God's elect in this world are few, very few, when compared with the multitudes who perish. In the days of Noah only Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Lot was the only person in Sodom whom God had chosen. Of the vast multitude who left Egypt, only two, Joshua and Caleb, entered the land of promise. The rest perished in unbelief. There were 851 prophets at Carmel, only Elijah knew God. When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he said, "*I and some few men with me*" came to do the work (Nehemiah 2:12). Isaiah said that when the judgment of God came upon the earth, there would be "*few men left*" (Isaiah 2:6). A great multitude was carried away into Babylon; but when they came to Jeremiah in repentance, they said, "*we are left but a few of many*" (Jeremiah 42:2).

Our Lord Jesus said concerning the way of faith and life, "*Few there be that find it.*" (Matthew 7:14). And in his parables Christ made it plain that there are "*few that be saved*" (Luke 13:20-25). At the last time, in that age of the church depicted by Sardis there will be only "*a few names*" found among the faithful (Revelation 3:4).

This is plainly the teaching of Holy Scripture: Among the multitudes who wear the name of Christ, and profess to be his followers, there are only a few who know him and are saved. The rest are perishing under the delusion of a false hope.

Hear the word of the Lord, and be warned. Are you among the many who are perishing; or are you among the few who are chosen, the few who trust Christ alone for eternal salvation? With the apostle Peter, I solemnly admonish you to give diligence to make your calling and election sure. Has Christ been revealed in you? Do you know the Son of God? Do you truly trust Christ alone as your Savior? Is Jesus Christ your Lord and Master? If you will be honest, you can know whether or not you are among the few whom God has chosen. You can know your election. Paul told the Thessalonians plainly that he knew they were God's elect for five reasons (1 Thessalonians 1:4-10). These are certain identifying marks of God's elect.

1. God's elect hear and receive the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Being taught of God, they are assured of Divine truth.
2. God's elect follow Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:3, 6). Like Christ, those who are truly born of God, believe God, serve God with patience, hope, and love, and walk before him in the joy of faith. Like their Master, the people of God persevere in the hour of trial. They follow him.
3. God's elect are committed to Christ and to the gospel of his grace (1 Thessalonians 1:8).
4. God's elect repent of their sins and turn to God with a true heart (1 Thessalonians 1:9).
5. God's elect live in this world as men and women of expectation and hope, "*waiting for his son*" (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

If indeed you and I are among those who are elect of God, our hearts should be filled with gratitude, praise, and admiration for him (Romans 11:33-36). The only difference between the many who perish and the few who are chosen is the difference which grace has made (1 Corinthians 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-14). As for me, I gladly ascribe the whole of my salvation to God, who

loved me freely with an everlasting love and saved me by his grace. “*By the grace of God I am what I am.*” I am chosen by grace, redeemed by grace, called by grace, given faith to believe by grace, preserved by grace, and free grace alone shall bring me safely into heaven’s eternal glory (Jude 24-25).

“Oh to grace, how great a debtor,  
Daily I’m constrained to be!”

## A Sobering Exhortation

Then our Lord Jesus Christ gives us this very sobering exhortation: — “*Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able*” (v. 24). The word “*strive*” means “to agonize, labor fervently, and fight” to enter in at the strait gate. The word “*strait*” means “narrow, constricted, contracted, or close.” Here the Lord is showing us our responsibility. Our concern must not be what others may do, or even what may happen to others. Our responsibility is to seek the Lord ourselves, whether anyone else does or not.

The unbelief and indecision of others will be no excuse in the last day. We must never follow the multitudes. If we go to heaven alone, we must resolve by the grace of God to do so. If we follow Christ alone, we must be resolved to let all others perish if they will, but we will not perish with them. Whether we have many with us, or few, our responsibility is plain – “*Strive to enter in.*”

We must not go on in our unbelief, saying, “I can do nothing until God draws me.” It is my responsibility to draw near to God. “*Strive to enter in.*” God’s election and my own inability have nothing to do with my responsibility. I must “*strive to enter in.*” — “*The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*” (Matthew 11:12).

## A Solemn Warning

Then our Lord sets before us a very plain and solemn warning (vv. 25-30). — “*When once the master of the house is risen up,*

*and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are.”* The long and short of that is this: There is a day coming when the forbearance of God shall come to an end. He declares, “*My Spirit shall not always strive with man*” (Genesis 6:5). You can make what you want of that. Men can argue and debate for the rest of their lives about whether that is sound doctrine or rank Arminianism. I really have no interests in their wranglings. My concern is for your soul. And I know this, there is a day appointed by God when the door of mercy, which has been open to you for so long, shall be shut.

There comes a time when men and women cannot be saved, even while they live they are dead (Proverbs 1:22-31; Hosea 4:17). “*He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy*” (Proverbs 29:1). Our Lord is saying, “Strive to enter in now while you may, while the door is open before you, for the door will not always be open.” (Jeremiah 7:13-16).

## A Day of Reckoning

Then our Lord assures us that there is a day of reckoning and righteous judgment coming.

“Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you *yourselves* thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and *from* the west, and from the north, and *from* the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last” (Luke 13:26-30).

Many who think they are saved shall find themselves at last

under the wrath of the Lamb (vv. 26-28). Their religious profession, their great experiences, their doctrinal knowledge, their mighty works will all be vanity.

All will see what is right when it is too late. Hell is a place where truth is known too late! But in that last day all believers shall receive the full reward of heaven and eternal glory (vv. 29-30).

In this whole passage our Lord is making an illusion to the ancient marriage feasts, which were held at night. The house would be all lit up. And those who were admitted to the marriage feast would be in the light. Those who were excluded were in darkness outside, "*outer darkness.*" The guests entered by a narrow wicket gate, at which the porter stood to prevent any uninvited people from rushing into the feast. When all who had been invited were in the house, the door was shut. It would not be opened to those who were without, no matter how much they knocked (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2).

“Come, humble sinner, in whose breast  
A thousand thoughts revolve,  
Come with your guilt and fear oppressed,  
And make this last resolve

‘I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin  
Hath like a mountain rose;  
I know His courts I’ll enter in,  
Whatever may oppose.

Prostrate I’ll lie before His throne,  
And there my guilt confess;  
I’ll tell Him I’m a wretch undone,  
Without His sovereign grace.

I’ll to the gracious King approach,  
Whose scepter pardon gives;  
Perhaps He may command my touch,  
And then the suppliant lives!

Perhaps He will admit my plea,  
Perhaps will hear my prayer;  
But if I perish, I will pray,  
And perish only there.

I can but perish if I go,  
I am resolved to try;  
For if I stay away, I know,  
I must forever die.

But, if I die with mercy sought,  
When I the King have tried,  
This were to die (Delightful thought!)  
As sinner never died.’”

*Edmund Jones*

# Chapter 90

## “Ye Would Not”

Luke 13:30-35

“And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee. And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third *day* I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the *day* following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen *doth gather* her brood under *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until *the time* come when ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Luke 13:30-35).

### An Instructive Proverb

*First*, in verse 30 our Lord uses a proverb to describe the kingdom of God and the work of God. — “*And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.*”

What an instructive proverb this is! Do not fail to notice the context in which this proverb is given. Our Master is urging us to strive to enter into the strait gate (v. 24). He tells us that we must

do so now, for the hour is soon coming when he will shut the door, and none will be able to enter, though they long to do so. Then, he speaks of the Day of Judgment and eternity (vv. 25-29).

It is in this context that our Lord gives us this parable. — *“And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”*

This proverb was literally fulfilled when the gospel was first preached, has been fulfilled throughout the ages, is being fulfilled now, and shall be fulfilled in eternity. The Jews who were first became last; and the Gentiles who were last became first.

But there is more here than simply the declaration of God’s method of grace in dealing with the Jews and with his elect among the Gentiles. In this proverb our Lord is teaching us something about God’s method of grace and who they are who are the objects of his eternal mercy, love, and grace, who they are whom he has chosen to save. Those who think they are and appear to be first in line for heaven will be last in the Day of Judgment. And those who think themselves to be and appear to be last in line for the grace of God will be first in the Day of Judgment. God’s elect are seldom those we would choose (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

“Ah, Grace! Into unlikeliest hearts  
It is thy boast to come;  
The glory of thy light to find  
In darkest spots a home.

Thy choice (O God of goodness!) then  
I lovingly adore:  
Oh, give me grace to keep Thy grace,  
And grace to long for more.”

## A Blessed Fact

*Second*, in verses 31-32 our Savior sets before us a blessed fact that ought to constantly quieten and calm our hearts in the face of trouble.

No doubt, when the Pharisees heard what our Lord said about them being last in the Day of Judgment and of others going before them into the kingdom of God, they understood that he was talking about them. I rather suspect that he was looking them right in the eye when he said it. So they thought they could scare the Master into silence and get him to quit preaching. — *“The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee”* (v. 31).

Perhaps Herod, the ruler of Galilee, who had beheaded John the Baptist, had let it be known that he was determined to kill our Savior. But it may be that the Pharisees simply invented the report. (Never put anything past lost religious men, who are determined to justify themselves.) Whether the report was true or false, it was obviously the intent of these Pharisees to intimidate the Master; but their scheme backfired.

*“And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected”* (v. 32). — Our Lord was not frightened by the Pharisees or by Herod, but there is more here than that.

In his reply to the Pharisees our Master simply stated, “My time to leave this world has not yet come. My work is not yet finished. Until that time comes, you can tell *‘that fox’* for me that he has no power to harm me. I fear him no more than I fear a yelping little fox that is scared of his own shadow.”

*“Today, and tomorrow, and the third day”* are not prophetic terms, but are used simply as a declaration of the fact that our Savior was assured that the time of his life on earth, the time of his service to the glory of God and men, and the time of his death were appointed by his Father and ours, and could not be shortened by Herod, or by anyone, or by anything.

Our Master, by using the word *“perfected”* to describe his death, was saying, “I shall finish what I came here to do. I will not leave this world until my purpose, the purpose appointed for me by my Father, is completed. Then, my life shall be complete.”

It is no accident that this same word (*perfected*) is applied to

our Savior twice in the Book of Hebrews and to his people, the people he came here to make perfect, three times (Hebrews 2:10; 5:9; 10:10-14; 11:40; 12:23). Our Lord's perfection as the God-man Mediator, as our Covenant Surety, was and is wrapped up in the salvation (perfection) of those he came here to save. The law could never make anyone perfect (Hebrews 10:1); but Christ did. And he is perfected because he has perfected his people by the work he finished as our Mediator, Surety, Representative, and Substitute (Hebrews 10:10-14; 11:40).

What our Lord here says of himself is true of every believer. The Lord God has put us on this earth for a specific time, to accomplish a specific purpose, and nothing shall prevent it. Nothing can add to or shorten our days. The lesson to be learned from this is clear: — Our times are entirely in the hands of our God.

Oh, may God give me grace to live in the frame of mind and heart my Lord exemplified here! We ought to possess a calm, unshaken confidence in our Father's good purpose. If our hearts are fixed, trusting the Lord, we shall not be afraid of evil tidings. Our times are in our Father's hands (Psalms 112:4-10; 31:13-20).

Let this be my attitude before every danger, every foe, every trouble, every slandering tongue, every deceitful spirit: — I have and shall continue to have only that which is good for me. I shall live until my work is done, and not a moment longer. All the powers of earth and hell combined cannot harm me. All the powers of earth and hell combined cannot destroy my life, until the time my Father has ordained. And all the physicians on earth cannot preserve me for one second beyond that time.

Nothing is beyond the reach of a man who has such an attitude regarding his life; and, if we believe God, that ought to be our attitude. The hairs of our heads are all numbered. Our steps are all ordered of the Lord. All things work together for our good. If some Shemei cusses me, the Lord will do me good by the wretch's foul tongue. If afflictions befall me, they shall only assist me. All things are mine. — Life! — Death! — Things Present! — Things to Come! — All things are mine, for I am Christ's and Christ is God's! Let me therefore live and serve my

God with utter abandonment to care and fear. — “Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” And, then, “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalms 23:6; 56:4; 118:6; 92:1-15; Hebrews 13:5-6)

“For it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem” (v. 33). — The word translated here, “it cannot be,” is found nowhere else in the Word of God. It means “it is impossible.” Yet, many prophets (John the Baptist, to name just one) died somewhere else. So what does our Lord’s statement mean? It means two things:

1. It would be an unusual thing, the exception, not the rule, for a prophet to die anywhere except at Jerusalem. It would be an unusual thing, the exception, not the rule, for a prophet to die by the hands of any, except at the hands of those who professed to be the servants and representatives of God.
2. And, second, our Lord here speaks prophetically of his own death. Remember, he is addressing the Pharisees. He is saying, “When I (that great Prophet of whom Moses spoke), when I die it will be at your hands, at Jerusalem; but I am not there yet; and my hour has not yet come.” It is against that backdrop that we must hear his next word.

## A Willing Savior

*Third*, in verse 34 we see how tender, compassionate, and willing our Lord Jesus Christ is to save sinners who have earned and fully deserve his everlasting fury.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen *doth gather* her brood under *her* wings, and ye would not!”

Oh, what a willing Savior our Savior is! He is God who “*delighteth in mercy!*” Aren’t you thankful? Many try to say this cannot be understood of our Lord Jesus in a strict sense, as God, that we must understand this as a display of our Master’s human

emotions. The problem with that is this: — I have not yet found one of those precise theologians who could tell me how to divide our Redeemer into two persons. This man is God; and this God is man; but he is one Person with two natures.

Let us never try to put God in our little box. He just won't fit! Let us never try to be more theologically precise than the plain statement of Holy Scripture. If these blessed, blessed words that fell from the lips of him into whose lips all grace has been poured choke you, you need choking. If you cannot read them without having to explain them away, you need a course in remedial reading.

Salvation is entirely the work of God. — All will be saved in the end who were chosen to salvation from the beginning, them and no one else. — All will be with Christ in glory for whom Christ made atonement and satisfaction at Calvary, them and no one else. — All will be crowned with the heavenly hosts who have been effectually called by the Holy Ghost, them and no one else. — But eternal ruin, eternal damnation, everlasting woe is altogether the work of man.

Hear what this Book teaches: — If you are saved, go to heaven, enjoy eternal life and glory in the bliss of God's presence, it will be because of God's will and God's work alone. And if you are lost, perish under the wrath of God, and go to a dark, Christless, eternal hell, it will be your fault, because of your will, and your work alone. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is as willing to save as he is mighty to save (Isaiah 45:22; 55:1-3, 6-7; Matthew 11:28-30; 23:37; Luke 13:34; John 7:37-38). Do you not hear his willingness in his words?

If you are lost, perish under the wrath of God, and go to a dark, Christless, eternal hell, it will be your fault, because of your will, and your work alone (Isaiah 59:1-2; John 5:40). The Lord Jesus Christ came here to save lost sinners. He came "*to seek and to save that which was lost.*" The Son of God died in the room and stead of the ungodly. The Lamb of God is seated upon the throne of grace in heaven, waiting to be gracious, waiting to save sinners.

Read verse 34 one more time and hear the tender, compassionate and willing heart of Immanuel.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen *doth gather* her brood under *her* wings, and ye would not!”

He knew the wickedness of that city. He knew what crimes had been committed by them. He knew all the prophets they had hated and murdered. He knew what they wanted to do and soon would do to him. Yet, he pities them! Oh, may he give me his Spirit and his grace, that I may be tender, compassionate, and merciful to men!

## Divine Judgment

*Fourth*, in verse 35 our Savior teaches us that in the last day, in that great Day of Judgment, he will be completely vindicated and honored, even by those who perish under his wrath.

“Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until *the time* come when ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

“*Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!*” — This is what you have chosen. You shall forever eat the fruit of your own ways (Proverbs 1:31). The God you have despised and forsaken has despised and forsaken you forever!

“*Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*” — You shall see me no more until you see me glorified by all as the Christ of God. In my entry into Jerusalem, when all, even those who later cry, “*crucify him,*” shall cry, “Here is the Blessed One who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Luke 19:37-38) And in my glorious second advent when you shall say, as the gaping pit of hell opens wide its mouth to

swallow you up, “Here is the Blessed One who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Revelation 1:7; Philippians 2:9-11; Isaiah 45:22-25).

“Ye sinners, seek His grace,  
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;  
Fly to the shelter of His cross,  
And find salvation there.

So shall the curse remove,  
By which the Savior bled;  
And that last, awful day shall pour  
His blessings on your head!”

# Chapter 91

## The Sabbath Day – The Day of Mercy

### Luke 14:1-6

“And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things” (Luke 14:1-6).

The Lord God declares by the prophet Isaiah...

“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.”

(Isaiah 58:13-14)

Our all-glorious Savior made the sabbath a delight for many while he was upon the earth, and continues to make the gospel

Sabbath, that the old, legal sabbath portrayed, a delight to sinners to this day.

Christ is our Sabbath; and we find delight in him. When a sinner is turned from his way, from his sin, from the pleasure of his depraved heart, and from this world to the Lord Jesus Christ, finding mercy, grace, salvation, and rest in him, he finds that Christ, in whom he rests, is a delight, a luxury, and that faith in him is an honor. Indeed, all who trust Christ, delight themselves in him, triumph over all their foes in him, and shall at last obtain the full heritage of the heavenly Canaan, called here "*the heritage of Jacob.*" "*For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*"

## A Sabbath Day Miracle

During the time of our Lord's earthly ministry, the sabbath day was used as a day for healing. By his example, our Savior displayed that the Old Testament sabbath day was intended and designed by our God to portray this day of grace.

*"And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him"* (v. 1). — The Jews commonly held great, lavish feasts on their sabbath day. On this occasion our Lord was invited to the house of one of the chief of the Pharisees, one of the Sanhedrim, one of the primary, best known of that band of self-righteous legalists. Our Lord was not invited to the Pharisee's house out of courtesy, but because these fine, law-keeping, sabbath-keeping religionists had hatched a plan to trap the Master. So "*they watched him.*"

*"And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy"* (v. 2). — These *good, kind* religious men baited their trap by setting a certain man before the Savior who had "*the dropsy.*" Dropsy is an old term for congestive heart failure. This condition is accompanied by swelling, scanty urine, poor appetite, sluggishness, and debility. The swelling usually begins in the feet and ankles and proceeds up the legs towards the abdomen. It is fairly common among diabetics. In addition to the swelling, the bladder functions poorly, a person loses his appetite

and becomes very sluggish. His swollen limbs become debilitating. After a while, it becomes obvious that he is terribly sick and will soon die, if something is not done to help him.

When sulfuric acid is generated in the body, it unites with water and causes the swelling. This produces heat, which expands the capillaries. The pressure forces the serum through the walls of the blood vessels, producing inflammation and dropsy.

It is interesting that only Luke, the physician, records this miracle performed by our Lord. Perhaps he did so because in his day any man found in the condition of this man was doomed to a slow, painful death. There was no cure for him, at least no cure that could be wrought by the hands of men.

These men brought this poor, dying wretch to the Pharisee's house for no other reason than to entrap the Son of God. They cared nothing for him. As religion always does, they were simply using him for their own purposes. But it is written, "*Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain*" (Psalm 76:10). And their wrath soon showed forth our Savior's praise. These devils were but vassals, by whom the Lord of glory was pleased to bring a certain, chosen, dying man to him that he might show in that man the wondrous, saving power of his mercy, love and grace.

*"And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?"* (v. 3) — Though they never spoke a word, the Savior answered them. He answered their thoughts. They were not merely dealing with a man. They were not attempting to trick a mere prophet. They were dealing with the God of Glory, trying to lay a trap for the omnipotent, omniscient God, and he lets them know it. The Lord Jesus knew exactly what they were up to. He asked them, "*Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?"*

*"And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go"* (v. 4). — They held their peace, because they dared not answer. They were trapped by their own trap. They dared not say anything that might show any agreement with the

Master. They could not say “yes” without consenting to what he was about to do. And they could not say “no” without denying that works of mercy were permitted on the sabbath day by Moses. Indeed, the sabbath day was designed to portray this great gospel day in which we live, this day of mercy and grace.

Once the Master had shamed these babblers into silence, he took the man with the dropsy and healed him. He who could dry up the Red Sea, calm the waves of the raging Galilee, and bring water out of a rock had no difficulty drawing a little water from this man’s body. Immediately, the swollen limbs were made whole, perfectly healthy. Then he who was the real Master of Ceremonies in this Pharisee’s house dismissed the man from the table and company and the company of his foes; and he went home perfectly cured.

What a picture this is of our Savior’s works of grace in chosen, redeemed sinners! — He took him. — He healed him. — He let him go.

*“And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?”* (v. 5). — Again, our Master answered the unspoken quibbles of this cruel, merciless, religious crowd that hated him, hated God, and hated men. They were obviously incensed by what he had done, incensed that a poor, dying man was made whole on the sabbath day. Yet, not one of them would allow his own ox or ass to drown on the sabbath day, if he could help it. Our Lord’s obvious, bold insinuation was this: — You gentlemen obviously care much more for your property, for your own beasts than you do for a human being. *“And they could not answer him again to these things”* (v. 6).

## Other Sabbath Miracles

Did you ever notice how often our Lord chose to perform his miracles of mercy upon poor, needy souls on the sabbath day? In the gospels we are given six specific cases of cures wrought on the sabbath day. I need not remind you that man was created on the sixth day. Six is the number of man. Our Lord, by performing

these six cures on the sabbath day, seems to be saying, “*The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath*” (Mark 2:27).

1. The case before us in Luke 14 is one.
2. On the sabbath day our Savior cast the devil out of a man (Luke 4:31-37).
3. Luke 6 tells us of our Lord healing a man’s withered hand on the sabbath day (Luke 6:6-11).
4. In Luke 13 our Savior healed a woman who had been plagued with a crippling infirmity for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17).
5. In John 5 we see our Savior healing a poor, impotent man, a man who had been impotent for a long, long time (John 5:1-9).
6. In John 9 our Lord heals a man born blind, again on the sabbath day (John 9:1-14).

There are three special, very instructive features about all of these six miracles that ought to catch our attention. *First*, they were all performed on the sabbath day. This day is the day of salvation. Oh, may it be for you the day of salvation. Then, you will call Christ our Sabbath and this his day of grace a delight. *Second*, each of these wonders was performed by Christ alone. *Third*, not one of these poor souls sought the Lord’s mercy.

In every example the Savior was found of them that sought him not (Isaiah 65:1). The possessed man entreated Christ to leave him alone (Luke 4:34). The man with the withered hand did not think of cure (Luke 6:6). The infirm woman had no hope of healing (Luke 13:11). The man with the dropsy did not ask for the blessing (Luke 14:2). The impotent man did not seek Christ (John 5:5). It was a thing unheard of that the eyes of a man born blind should be opened, and, therefore, he did not expect it (John 9:32). But the Lord of the Sabbath is not bound by men. Omnipotent grace is never withered. The arm of the Lord never waits for the will of the sinner (Romans 9:15).

The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to save chosen sinners; and save them he will. He has redeemed them by his precious blood. He will save them by his omnipotent mercy. And

he will do it without their aid, without their work, without their will, even without their desire. — He does it freely!

Physicians never come to the sick until someone sends for them. Christ came to us, who sent not for him, which made him say, “*I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not*” (Isaiah 65:1). He came to us before we ever thought of coming to him. He sought us long before we sought him. He found us before we ever dreamed of finding him.

When the physician does come, he expects to be paid for his services, whether or not they are effectual. “*The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10); and he paid all the charge of his long journey.

The great Physician now is here,  
The sympathizing Jesus!  
He speaks the drooping heart to cheer —  
O hear the voice of Jesus!

Your many sins are all forgiven.  
O hear the voice of Jesus!  
Go on you way in peace to heaven,  
And wear a crown with Jesus!

All glory to the dying Lamb!  
I now believe in Jesus.  
I love the blessed Savior’s name,  
I love the name of Jesus.

And when to that bright world above  
We rise to be with Jesus,  
We’ll sing around the throne of love,  
His name, the name of Jesus!

## Delightful Sabbath

In Isaiah 58:13-14 the prophet of God, with the inspired vision of prophecy, looks beyond the carnal, Jewish sabbath and sees in it a picture of Christ, who is the true Sabbath, and the blessed rest

of faith in him<sup>15</sup>. When can we, when do we, “*Call the sabbath a delight.*” — We can and do call the sabbath a delight only when we are made to experience God’s healing of our souls in Christ, only when we are brought to the blessed rest of faith in him who is our Sabbath, when we keep the sabbath of faith, ceasing from our own works and resting in Christ alone for our entire acceptance with God.

We need to understand that the sabbath God required the Jews to keep was only a temporary, typical ordinance, which represented Christ and our redemption by him. When the Lord God instituted sabbath keeping to the Jews in the legal dispensation, he gave two reasons for it.

*First*, the sabbath was to be kept as a symbol of God’s rest (Exodus 20:8-11). It represented the completion of God’s creation and the satisfaction of God in his work. Though God’s work of creation has been marred by the sin and fall of our race, the sabbath day portrayed a blessed day of glorious rest called “*the times of restitution of all things*” (Acts 3:21; Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 1:10), when all things shall be restored to God.

*Second*, the sabbath day was a constant reminder of Israel’s redemption out of Egypt. Hence, it was a picture of our redemption by Christ (Deuteronomy 5:15). In other words, the sabbath day, like all other aspects of the Mosaic law, was a picture prophecy of our perfect redemption by Christ. As the Jews rested on the seventh day of the week from all their works, so believers find perfect rest and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Christ Our Sabbath

We can and will call the sabbath a delight only when we understand that Christ is our Sabbath. We do not observe a literal, legal sabbath day, because Christ is our Sabbath, and we rest in

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15 This becomes obvious when we observe that Isaiah’s exhortation - “*Call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord,*” should read, “Call the sabbath a delight the Holy One of the Lord.”

him. I know many who pretend to keep a literal sabbath day. Many try their best to delight in legal sabbath work. But I do not know a sabbatarian in the world who really delights in his attempts at sabbath keeping, not a single one. Every sabbatarian I know finds the yoke of their legal observance oppressive and galling. It is a spiritual flagellation they feel they must perform in order to be holy.

Sabbath keeping, like animal sacrifices, was a part of the Old Testament law. It has nothing to do with New Testament worship. I know that the sabbath day is frequently mentioned in the four gospels and the Book of Acts, during that transitional period in which the church of God passed from the Old Testament era into the New. However, it is always mentioned in connection with the Jews and Jewish worship in the temple, or in their synagogues. But it is mentioned only two times in all the Epistles (Romans through Revelation).

In Colossians 2:16-17 we read, *“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”* Here the Apostle Paul, writing by inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, forbids the observance of legal sabbath days in any form. He does so on the basis of the fact that in Christ God’s elect are entirely free from the law (Romans 7:4; 10:4).

In Hebrews 4:3-4, 9-11 the sabbath that remains in this gospel age is called *“rest.”* Here the Apostle shows us that all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ keep the sabbath in a spiritual way. That is to say, they and they only truly keep the sabbath by faith in him, by resting in him.

## Finished Work

We can and will call the sabbath a delight when we realize that our all glorious Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Mediator, has entered into his rest; and his rest is glorious, because he has finished his work (Hebrews 4:10; Isaiah 11:10). Our Savior’s rest in heaven is glorious and it is his glory. — *“His rest shall be*

*glory!*” As God rested on the seventh day, because his work of creation was finished, so the God-man our Mediator has entered into his rest in heaven, because he has made all things new for his people, having finished his work of redemption (Romans 8:34; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Hebrews 10:10-14).

Behold our exalted Savior! Do you see him seated upon his throne in heaven? There he sits in undisturbed and undisturbable sovereign serenity! His rest is his glory (John 17:2; Philippians 2:9-11). That exalted God-man, as our divinely appointed Representative, has fulfilled all the legal sabbath requirements for us, even as he did all the other requirements of the law. Now, in heaven he is keeping an everlasting sabbath rest (Isaiah 53:10-12). And his rest, which is his glory, tells us that he has finished his work (John 17:4; 19:30), the salvation of his people is certain (Hebrews 9:12), and all his enemies shall soon be made his footstool (Hebrews 10:13). There is no more work to be done. Christ did it all! And when all the work was done for us, our blessed Savior entered into his rest. Now, all who find rest in him call that sabbath a delight!

## Sabbath Rest

All who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ keep the sabbath by faith (Hebrews 4:3), because we have entered into his rest; and we call this blessed sabbath rest of faith in Christ a delight, the delight of our souls. We do not yet keep the sabbath perfectly, because we do not yet trust our Savior as we should. We do not yet trust him perfectly. But we do keep the sabbath truly and sincerely by faith. Our sabbath observance is not a carnal, literal thing. We do not keep a sabbath day. God forbids that (Colossians 2:16-17). We keep the sabbath spiritually by faith.

Remember, the sabbath day was ordained by God in the ceremonial worship of the Jews in the Old Testament as a symbol of God’s rest after creation and as a reminder of the Jews redemption out of Egypt. The essence of sabbath observation was self-denial and consecration to God. Anything personally profitable or pleasurable was expressly forbidden (Isaiah 56:2;

58:13; Ezekiel 20:12, 21). Sabbath observance was, in its essence, an unconditional, all-encompassing, self-denial. It was a renunciation of self and a dedication of one's self to God. That is exactly the way we observe the sabbath spiritually by faith in Christ, not one day in seven, but all the days of our lives. The believer's life is a perpetual keeping of the sabbath!

The Lord Jesus Christ gives rest to every sinner who comes to him in faith. He says, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). Are you laboring and heavy-laden under the load of sin and guilt? Do you long for rest? In your inmost soul do you struggle hard with sin, longing to find peace with God? Will you hear what the Lord Jesus says? "*Come*" — That is: believe, trust, rely upon me. "*Come unto me!*" — Not to the preacher. Not to my church. Not even to my doctrine. But "*Come unto me, and I will give you rest!*" When a sinner comes to Christ, he quits working for God's favor, because he rests his soul upon the finished work of his Substitute (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

Yet, this sabbath of faith involves more than a ceasing from our works and the remembrance of our redemption by Christ. It also involves, in its very essence, the consecration of our lives to our dear Savior (Matthew 11:29-30). We keep the sabbath of faith and find rest unto our souls as we willfully, deliberately, wholeheartedly surrender to Christ as our Lord. If we would keep the sabbath, truly keep the sabbath, it will take considerably more than going to church on Sunday and reserving one day a week for religious exercises! We keep the sabbath by putting ourselves under the yoke of Christ's dominion, submitting to his will in all things, learning of him what to believe, how to live, and how to honor God. As we do, we find that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. When we submit to Christ's dominion, when we bow to his will, we find rest for our souls and "*call the sabbath a delight!*"

While he walked on this earth, our Lord Jesus performed so many miracles of mercy on the legal sabbath day to teach us that "*the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath*" (Mark 2:27), to teach us that the dawning of the true Sabbath is the day

of mercy for chosen, redeemed sinners.

# Chapter 92

## “Take the Lowest Room”

### Luke 14:7-11

“And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:7-11).

Our Lord Jesus is not here giving us a lesson about the excellence of behaving with humility before men and moral virtue. This is obvious for three reasons:

1. He is addressing a band of lost, self-righteous religious Pharisees.
2. That which He says here simply is not true with regard to earthly things. In this world, if you want to get ahead, you must push your way ahead. If you want the highest seat, you must take it. If you are willing to settle for the lowest place, you are sure to get it. Everyone around you will gladly accommodate your wish.
3. In His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1-8), our Savior taught us plainly that we must never attempt, in

any way, to show our religion, to show godliness, or to show spirituality and devotion to God by any outward action. Let us adorn the Gospel (Titus 2:10) by our behavior, always. But we must never make a show of godliness.

Believers, men and women who live for and seek the glory of God must never behave as proud worldlings do. Let it ever be ours to seek the glory of our God, the good of men, and the welfare of our brethren, each preferring the other better than himself, each submitting to the other, each promoting the other, and each serving the other. But we do not attempt to act religious or make a show of godliness before men.

### Christ's Example

Clearly, our Lord teaches us by the parable in these verses, throughout the Scriptures, and by His own example that we ought to be and always behave as truly humble people. One passage will be sufficient to show this: — Philipians 2:1-11.

“If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth;

And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:1-11)

Here in Luke 14:7-11 our Master teaches humility in two ways. First, He tells those who are bidden to a wedding to “*sit down in the lowest room.*” Second, He declares a great principle, which frequently fell from His lips: “*Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*”

## KEY

The key to this parable is found in Proverbs 25:6-7. — “*Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.*” The Lord must have had this passage in mind when He spoke this parable. He is the King to whose wedding feast sinners are bidden, before whom we must come in humility.

The shame and confusion of face which in this parable is represented as the lot of mortified pride does not always follow it in this world. Self-assertion, self-assumption, forwardness, and boasting, do not always entail a disgraceful fall upon the person who behaves arrogantly. The meek do not as yet “*inherit the earth,*” though they assuredly will. David said of the ungodly, “*with their mouth they speak proudly*” (Psalm 17:10), and “*speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous*” (Psalm 31:18).

Men who are ambitious and self-seeking at times attain to the height of their ambition, provided, of course, that they have other qualities, such as prudence, cleverness, and perseverance. But a day is coming when the words of Christ with which the parable concludes (v. 11), will be verified in the case of every man. He is the King before whom all pride displays itself, and before whom it will be abased.

And there is the greater reason that He should do so, for when He had the highest place in the universe next to the eternal

Father, He abased Himself, and took the lowest place, even the place of the cross of death (2 Corinthians 8:9), in order to save and exalt forever all who humble themselves before Him. The Judge at that day will remember and humble every act of pride, just as He will remember and reward those who humble themselves before Him. He will bring every idle word into judgment, and make manifest the secrets of all hearts.

## **God's Work**

Yet, this humility is so contrary to our nature that we can never attain it. We can never perform it. We must be humbled by our God, or we will never humble ourselves before God. A humble man is a humbled man. We will never bow before the throne of grace until God Himself bows us by His grace. Oh, may God graciously humble us here rather than hereafter! It may be very bitter to have our pride mortified now, but it will be indescribably more bitter to have it mortified before men and angels, and before the presence of the great King and Judge of all the earth.

To know our own sinfulness and weakness and to know our need of Christ is the very beginning of salvation. This thing called "salvation" begins with the conviction of sin. Abraham, and Moses, and Job, and David, and Daniel, and Paul were all truly humbled men. They were men who knew themselves sinners before the thrice holy Lord God, sinners chosen, redeemed, called, forgiven, justified, and accepted in Christ.

## **Humility**

What is humility? One word describes it. The root of humility is right "knowledge." It is wrought in us by the revelation of Christ to us in that day when the Fountain of redemption is opened to us (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1). The man who really knows himself and his own heart, who knows God and His infinite majesty and holiness, who knows Christ and the price with which he has been redeemed, that man is a humbled man. He counts himself, like Jacob, unworthy of the least of all God's mercies. He says of

himself, like Job, “*I am vile.*” He cries, like Paul, “*I am chief of sinners.*” (Genesis 32:10; Job 40:4; 1 Timothy 1:15). He considers anything good enough for him, and indescribably better than he deserves. In lowliness of mind he esteems his brethren better than himself (Philippians 2:3).

Ignorance, nothing but sheer ignorance, ignorance of self, of God, and of Christ is the cause of all pride. From that miserable self-ignorance we should daily pray to be delivered. He is the wise man who knows himself; and he who knows himself will find nothing within to make him proud and everything to humble him.

But our Lord does not here set humility before these Pharisees as a virtue to be cultivated. Rather, He is here exposing and rebuking the pride of that self-righteousness and unbelief that keeps sinners from trusting him.

## Context

Look at the context in which this parable is given. Our Lord has just healed a poor, despised, needy man of the dropsy on the sabbath day, thereby condemning the Pharisees who used him to bait a trap, by which they hoped to destroy our Lord’s credibility as God’s prophet (vv. 1-6). Then, notice that the opening word of verse 7 is a conjunction — “*And.*” When the Pharisees could not answer Him, we read, “*And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms*” (v. 7).

Then, after giving this parable, the Lord declares to the proud Pharisee who had invited him to dinner that true humility, true goodness serves those who can give nothing in return, from whom no benefit can be derived (vv. 12-14). Obviously, He was not teaching this work monger how to earn God’s blessing in the resurrection. Rather, He is teaching this man and us how God dispenses His favor — freely! The gospel of Christ is likened to an invitation to a great feast. And the Lord God, our great Savior graciously calls the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind, those who cannot recompense Him, to His banqueting table.

One man in the crowd understood exactly what the Master was saying. Look at verse 15. — “*And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.*”

Then, our Lord continues His instruction. Remember, He is still in the Pharisee’s house. He is still talking about how men are to behave when they are invited to a wedding feast. Specifically, the Lord Jesus is here telling us how poor sinners must come to God’s great wedding feast.

“Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one *consent* began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord 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 hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper” (Luke 14:16-24).

## The Message

The purpose of our Lord Jesus in this parable is to teach us how sinners seeking mercy must come to God. Here is the message of the parable. — We must come to God, we must come to Christ as humble, worthless, doomed, damned, helpless, bankrupt sinners, taking our place in the dust before him. We must bow before Him

in shame, taking the lowest seat in the dust before the throne of grace. — *“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”*

This is a mystery that natural men do not understand. This is something no man will ever understand until he is born of God and taught by His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:7-14). In the natural world the way up is up, but in the spiritual world the way up is down. *“He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”* In the natural world, to live is to live, but in the spiritual world the way to live is to die. *“He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it”* (Matthew 10:39). In the natural world men find satisfaction in their own strength, but Paul declared, *“when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Corinthians 12:10). The greatest thing God can do for a person (whatever the cost) is to show him in heart and soul the vanity of all things in this world (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14), and to turn his interest, affection, love, and concern from the world to Christ (Matthew 5:3-12).

To be full is to be emptied of self. To be wise is to become a fool for Christ’s sake. To be clothed we must be stripped. To be rich we must be made poor (Proverbs 16:18-19; Matthew 5:3; 11:29; James 4:6). Would you come to God and obtain the mercy and grace that He alone can give? Come to Christ. Come, taking the only ground He gives, as a poor sinner with nothing to give, trusting Christ alone for everything (1 John 1:7-10). Let us ever come to God just as we came to him in the beginning. — *“As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him”* (Colossians 2:6).

“Nought have I gotten, but what I received.

Grace hath bestowed it, since I have believed.

Boasting excluded, pride I abase—

I’m only a sinner, saved by grace!”

# Chapter 93

## Living for Eternity

### Luke 14:12-15

“Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God” (Luke 14:12-15).

It is Saturday evening, the Jewish Sabbath, and the Lord Jesus has been invited to dinner by one of the leaders among the Pharisees (14:1), the most zealous of the zealous law-keepers among the Jews. There is no indication that I know of that our Savior was ever invited back a second time to a Pharisee’s house; and it is not hard to see why. It appears that every time He opened His mouth, He undressed someone’s hypocrisy. There never was another man whose words were so penetrating and so exposing. When our Lord spoke, He opened and exposed the hearts of men (Hebrews 4:12-13).

When our Lord spoke, He spoke as one having authority, divine, penetrating, omniscient authority. The Pharisees once reported of Him, “*Never man spake like this man*” (John 7:46).

It seems that every time our Lord spoke in a crowd, large or small, there was a division because of His words. Those who are

“of the truth” listen and obey. He tells us, “*My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me*” (John 10:27, 4). Those who are not of the truth do not have ears to hear or eyes to see. The Lord says to them, “*Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word...He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God*” (John 8:43,47).

## The Healing

The first thing our Lord did at this Saturday dinner was heal a man of dropsy. He asked the law-experts and Pharisees if they thought healing on the Sabbath was lawful. They did not answer, but their silence clearly meant, No it is not lawful. Back in Luke 13:14 the synagogue ruler spoke “*with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.*” Our Lord responds to their silence here the same way He responded to that. — “*And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?*” (Luke 14:5) Again, they gave no answer.

## Hypocrisy Undressed

The Master leaves it for them and us to draw the inference. It is unmistakable. — Religionists, legalists, and self-righteous Pharisees have a keen interest in their own welfare. When the things of God seem to stand between them and their personal interests, they have no difficulty bending the Word of God and compromising the things of God to accommodate their interests. The preservation of their own interests is clearly more important than the will of God, the Word of God, and the worship of God.

But when it comes to another person’s need, whose illness, pain, or loss is no skin off their noses, they become conveniently rigid in their hardness, that is to say, in their spirituality! The meanest, most wicked, hard-hearted people in this world are religious

people who have no idea who God is, “*whose god is their belly!*” Our Lord held such men in utter contempt; and I do, too. The first lesson for us to learn from this event in the earthly life of our Lord is this: Religion without Christ makes men and women twofold more the children of hell than they were before.

The first thing our Lord did at this dinner party was heal that poor man with the dropsy, exposing the hard-heartedness of His religious host. He publicly undressed the man’s hypocrisy. Not the most ingratiating thing to do to your host, but certainly the most gracious.

### Pride Undressed

Then, the second thing He did must have been even more shocking. Our Master publicly undressed the pride of the dinner guests, right there in front of everybody. He has been sitting there watching them come in. And what does He look for? How they are dressed? Where they are from? What are their jobs? No. He looks for what they love. The keen eye of omniscience knows where our treasure is. Sooner or later, he will expose it. Where our treasure is there our hearts are. So the Lord watches and sees what the treasure of these religious men is. Here it is: — They love the praise of men. They love to be esteemed for occupying the seats of honor. He watches as they move in and out of conversations, weaving their way, unnoticed by others.

What does the Son of God think of this love of honor and esteem, this love of distinction? He says, “*Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets*” (Luke 11:43; See Luke 20:46-47). Two things always go hand in hand with loving the place of honor: (1.) the exploitation of the weak and (2.) the condemnation of those deemed less honorable. If you crave the praise of men and a widow’s house stands in your way, you will devour it without a thought. But in the end your own house will collapse in the flood of God’s judgment. If we pursue the seat of honor on earth, there will be no seat for us in among the redeemed in glory (Luke 14:11; Matthew 5:3, 5, 7; 18:3). — “*For whosoever exalteth*

*himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”* (Luke 14:11).

## Motive Undressed

You might think the Lord has ruffled enough feathers for one evening. He had publicly undressed the hypocrisy of the legalists and their pride. Our Lord knew how to spoil a dinner party. But He is not done. Up to this point, He has been talking in general to the guests at the party. Now, He turns (vv. 12-14) to address the host. Here, He undresses the man’s motive, the motive of his heart, before all his guests.

“Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor *thy* rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.”

What an unusual way of thinking! What strange reasoning! The Lord says, “When you have a lavish dinner party, don’t invite your relatives, friends, and rich neighbors, who can repay you, but those from whom you can expect no gain or advantage of any kind.”

Our Lord could not have been more coarsely blunt if He had put His finger right in this proud Pharisee’s face. He said, “You, sir, hope to go to heaven because of your goodness, and there’s no goodness in you. You are motivated, in all your displays of goodness, by your own, personal interest. Everything you pretend to do for others, you really do for yourself. And that shall be your eternal ruin.”

Who on earth would talk like that? Probably someone whose Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36); someone who knows that 1000 years on this earth are like yesterday when it is gone (Psalm 90:4); someone who knows that our life is but a vapor that

appears and in a moment vanishes away (James 4:14); who knows that he who saves his life now will lose it, and he who loses it now in love will save it (Mark 8:35); and who knows that the resurrection, the Day of Judgment, and eternity are real. That someone is the Son of God, our Savior. No man ever spoke like this Man.

## Lessons Intended

But why did our Lord speak as He did at this dinner party? Why did He do the things He did? Was it merely to show up these men? Was it simply to expose their condemnation? Was it just to publicly humiliate them? Of course not! Our Master's purpose in His behavior and in His speech, here and always, was to teach and instruct us in very important spiritual things, to set forth the Gospel of God's free grace in Him. Let me show you some of the obvious lessons our Lord would have us learn from this passage.

1. The first thing to be learned from our Master here is the fact that the Son of God came into this world to seek, serve, and save poor, needy sinners, from whom He could never receive any recompense.

Be sure you do not misunderstand me. There is no doubt that our Lord teaches us, indeed the grace of God experienced in the heart teaches us as well as the whole of Holy Scripture, that we ought always to care for the poor and needy among us, particularly for those who are numbered among the saints. "*The poor shall never cease out of the land*" (Deuteronomy 15:11); and those who are able ought to be forward in assisting them. Not to do so is to hate and despise them; and those who do not love their brethren do not know God (1 John 3:14-17). As we ought to care for the poor, so, too, we ought to give particular care and attention to our weaker brethren. Bearing one another's burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:20).

But our Lord is not teaching this Pharisee a lesson in moral uprightness. His aim is much higher. Like the man described in verse 2, who had the dropsy, you and I are poor, helpless, perishing sinners. We could do nothing for ourselves. We could

not help ourselves. And no one else could help us, if they were so inclined. When the Lord first begins His work of grace in us, it is not because we want Him, or have come to Him, or have prayed for help. Not at all! This man apparently expected nothing from the Lord Jesus. There is no indication that he even looked at Him. But the Master took up the rich Pharisee's invitation to dinner, because that poor man with the dropsy was there, for whom the time of mercy had come.

2. The second thing that is obvious here is the fact that in order to save such poor, needy sinners as we are, the Son of God took the lowest place among men.

Humility is a gift of grace. The grace of God humbles men. But our Lord is not teaching this crowd to make themselves humble, that they might be exalted and recompensed in the Day of Judgment. Indeed, such self-serving humility is not humility at all, but a mere show of humility. Our Lord is describing true humility, His own (Philippians 2:1-11). His humility is exemplary. We ought to be of the same mind. But He is the pattern. His humility was voluntary. He humbled himself unto the very lowest, not that He might be exalted, but for the love He has to us and to the glory of God. For that, He has been exalted and shall be recompensed in the Day of Judgment (2 Corinthians 8:9; Isaiah 45:20-25; 53:9-12).

3. The third thing our Redeemer teaches us here is that there shall be a Resurrection Day and a Judgment Day.

Everything our Savior did in this world He did with eternity before His eyes. He lived in the constant awareness of eternity. Oh, may God give us grace to do the same!

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal. “For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (2

Corinthians 4:17-5:1).

We are immortal souls. We are all dying creatures, moving rapidly to the grave. There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust, a resurrection of life and a resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29). There shall be a Day of Judgment, at which we shall all be recompensed for all that we have done forever (Acts 17:31; Revelation 20:11-15).

The Judge of all in that great day shall be that Man who was crucified at Calvary, that Man who is seated on the throne in heaven, that Man who is God, the God-man, our Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. The basis of judgment shall be the record in heaven, the books of God's remembrance, and another book called, "*the Book of Life.*" All shall perish, all shall be forever damned whose names are not found written in the Book of Life. The torments heaped upon the damned in hell shall be a just recompense, an exact recompense, and an everlasting recompense of Divine justice; and the damned themselves shall be forced to acknowledge this.

Let us learn to live every day in the immediate prospect of the last great day, when the dead shall be raised to meet God in judgment. There shall be a resurrection after death. Let this never be forgotten. The life that we live here in the flesh is not all. The death of these bodies is not the end of our existence. The visible world around us is not the only world with which we have to do. All is not over when the last breath is drawn, and men and women are carried to their long home in the grave. The trumpet shall one day sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. All <sup>who</sup> are in the grave shall hear Christ's voice and come forth: they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.

Let us live like men and women who believe in a resurrection and a life to come, and desire to be always ready for another world. So living, we shall look forward to death with calmness. So living, we shall take patiently all that we have to bear in this world. Trials, losses, disappointments, ingratitude will affect us little. We shall not look for our reward here. Knowing that all will be rectified in that great day, and that the Judge of all the

earth will do right, we shall patiently await that day (Genesis 18:25).

But how can we bear the thought of a resurrection? What shall enable us to look forward to death, the resurrection, the judgment, and eternity without alarm? — Faith in Christ! Believing Him, we have nothing to fear. Our sins will not appear against us. The demands of God's law will be found completely satisfied. We shall stand firm in the great day, and none shall lay anything to our charge (Romans 8:33). All whose names are written in the Book of Life, all who stand before God in Christ, washed in his blood, robed in his righteousness, shall be forever blessed. And the bliss and glory and blessedness heaped upon the saved in heaven shall be a just recompense, an exact recompense, and an everlasting recompense of Divine justice (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16; 50:20).

There seems to have been one man in that crowd who heard and understood our Lord's words. Perhaps everything recorded in this passage came to pass specifically because the Lord Jesus had come to this place, to this Pharisee's house to seek and find this one sinner, whose time of love had come. Look at verse 15. — *“And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.”* I have found it so. Have you? — *“Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.”*

# Chapter 94

## The Great Supper

Luke 14:15-24

“And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed [is] he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one [consent] began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord 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 hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel [them] to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper” (Luke 14:15-24).

Our Lord Jesus is in the house of one of the chief Pharisees. He had performed a great miracle on the sabbath day, healing a man of the dropsy. The Pharisees and religious legalists, of course, were terribly offended by that act of mercy (vv. 1-6). Then, the

Master gave out a parable declaring His method of grace and salvation (vv. 7-11). In verses 12-14, He very pointedly applied the parable, speaking directly to the Pharisee who had invited him to dinner, exposing that man's hypocrisy. There was at least one man in the crowd who heard and understood what the Savior was saying. When he heard the Savior's words, that man said to the Master, "*Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God*" (v. 15). It is in response to that man's assertion that our Lord spoke the parable recorded in verses 16-24<sup>16</sup>. This is a parable full of instruction. May God the Holy Spirit now teach us its meaning and apply it to our hearts.

## A Great Supper

"*Then said he unto him*" — to the man who had declared, "*Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.*" — "*A certain man made a great supper.*" — This is not the Lord's Supper, which had not yet been established. And this is not the marriage supper of the Lamb, which will take place at the end of time. This great supper is the Gospel feast of the boundless grace of God set before poor, needy, hungry sinners in the preaching of the Gospel.

It is called a "*supper*," because it is made in the end of the world, in the last days. It is called a "*great supper*," because He who made the supper is the King of kings, and Lord of lords. It is a great supper, a feast of fat things, of wine upon lees well refined. This great, Gospel feast is a supper provided by the great God, spread at great cost (the precious blood of Christ), a supper with great provisions of mercy, love, and grace, a supper for great sinners with great needs, a supper for a great multitude, and a supper that is to last a great time, until the end of time.

"*And bade many*" — Certainly, the reference here is to the Jews, the many physical descendants of Abraham, to whom alone

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16 Though there are clearly points of similarity between this and the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22, these are two distinct parables, spoken on two separate occasions.

God sent the Gospel throughout the Old Testament. By the law and the Prophets, by John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself, and by the Apostles, the people of Israel were bidden to the supper and refused to come, refused to believe God. But we dare not limit the parable's message to the Jews. This word from God our Savior is to be applied to all who are privileged to hear the Gospel of the grace of God. The King of Heaven has made a great supper and bids you and me come to the supper.

## The Servant

*“And sent his servant at supper time”* — The servant here may refer to John the Baptist, or to the Lord Jesus, to the Apostles of Christ, or to the Spirit of God<sup>17</sup>. Certainly, the servant is

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17 A. W. Pink wrote, “In Luke 14:16 we read, “A certain man made a great supper, and bade many.” By comparing carefully what follows here with Matthew 22:2-10 several important distinctions will be observed. We take it that these passages are two independent accounts of the same parable, differing in detail according to the distinctive purpose and design of the Holy Spirit in each Gospel. Matthew's account — in harmony with the Spirit's presentation there of Christ as the Son of David, the King of the Jews — says, “A certain *king* made a marriage for his son.” Luke's account — where the Spirit presents Christ as the Son of Man — says, “A certain *man* made a great supper and bade many.” Matthew 22:3 says, “And sent forth His *servants*;” Luke 14:17 says, “And sent His *servant*.” Now what we wish particularly to call attention to is, that all through Matthew's account it is “servants,” whereas in Luke it is always “servant.” The class of readers for whom we are writing are those that believe unreservedly, in the *verbal* inspiration of the Scriptures, and such will readily acknowledge that there must be some reason for this change from the plural number in Matthew to the singular one in Luke. We believe the reason is a weighty one and that attention to this variation reveals an important truth. We believe that the servants in Matthew, speaking generally, are *all* who go forth preaching the Gospel, but that the “Servant” in Luke 14 is the Holy Spirit Himself. This is not incongruous, or derogatory to the Holy Spirit, for God the Son, in the days of His earthly ministry, was the Servant of Jehovah (Isaiah 42:1). It will be observed that in Matthew 22 the “servants” are sent forth to do three things: first, to “*call*” to the wedding (v. 3); second, to “*tell* those which are bidden ... all things are ready; come unto the marriage (v. 4); third, to “*bid* to the marriage” (v. 9); and these three are the things which those who minister the Gospel today are now doing. In Luke 14 the Servant is also sent forth to do three things: first, He is “to *say* to them

representative of every servant of God who is sent forth to preach the Gospel of the grace of God to perishing sinners. — “*To say to them that were bidden, come*” — Gospel preachers are God’s servants, sent forth into the world to call sinners to the table of grace, to call sinners to Christ.

And all God’s servants proclaim a feast of God’s providing — “*for all things are now ready.*” For all who come to the feast, for all who trust Him, there is in the Lord Jesus Christ a righteousness ready to wear, pardon freely bestowed, a redemption fully accomplished, and a full and perfect everlasting salvation. There is in Christ a sonship for sinners in union with Him. But this is one wedding feast at which no gifts are accepted. Everything is freely provided!

## Excuses for Unbelief

“*And they all with one consent began to make excuse*” — Unbelievable as it may appear, all who are called to Christ make excuses not to come. And all who are called make the same excuses. All who are called of God by the Gospel to life and salvation in Christ, all who are called to believe on the Son of God, all who are bidden to follow Christ, have (in their own minds) completely reasonable excuses for disobedience. Rather than praying to God for mercy, they say, “*I pray thee have me excused!*”

“*The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it.*” What fool would buy a piece of ground, and then go see it? He bought a piece of ground from a man without seeing it. What confidence he must have had in that

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that were bidden, Come: for all things are now ready” (v. 17); second, He is to “*bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind*” (v. 21); third, He is to “*compel them to come in*” (v. 25), and the last two of these the Holy Spirit *alone* can do! In the above scripture we see that “*the Servant,*” the Holy Spirit, *compels* certain ones to come into the “supper” and herein is seen His sovereignty, His omnipotency, His divine sufficiency. The clear implication from this word “compel” is, that those whom the Holy Spirit *does* “bring in” are *not willing* of themselves *to come.*”

man. But he has no confidence in God! The second was worse. *“And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them.”* He bought five yoke of oxen without knowing whether they could bear a yoke or pull a cart, taking a man’s word for it. Men will do that; but none will believe God! The excuse made by the third man is the worst of the three. *“I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”* Had he said, I will not come, he would at least have told the truth.

It is not only man’s impotence that keeps him from Christ, but also his will. He has no will to trust the Son of God. It is true that no man can come to Christ, except as God gives him grace to come (John 6:44). Yet, none will come (John 5:40). That is a matter of personal, deliberate choice and responsibility for which all will be held accountable in the Day of Judgment (Proverbs 1:23-33).

He who has married a wife is doubly responsible to come to the feast. He is responsible for himself and his wife. If his wife will not come, he is a fool to let her keep him away. They that have wives must be as though they had none. We must not allow carnal unions, sentiments, and affections to keep us from following Christ. Adam paid a very high price for hearkening to the voice of his wife. Our Lord requires that we forsake husbands and wives, sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, as well as houses and lands, if we would be His disciples.

## The Servant’s Report

*“So that servant came and showed his Lord these things”* — Gospel preachers watch over the souls of men as those who must give account (Hebrews 13:7, 17). — *“Then the master of the house being angry”* — Multitudes think it is a light thing to trample the blood of Christ under their feet, but that will not always be the case. God almighty will soon make all men see how offensive unbelief is to Him (Proverbs 1:23-33; 29:1).

*“And said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city; and bring in hither the poor”* — We preach the Gospel to the poor, those who have no bread for their souls, those

who have no righteous garments, but only filthy rags, those who have no money to buy, no means to pay their debt. That is to say, the Gospel of God's free grace in Christ is good news to those who are poor in spirit.

*“And the maimed”* — Grace is for the needy, poor, impotent, helpless sinners, without strength, without hope, without life, without help. — *“And the halt”* — Christ saves the lost, those who are halting because they do not know where to go for grace and mercy and help, and do not know the way. Sinners are not only poor, lost, and ignorant, but cripple too, being maimed by a terrible fall. — *“And the blind”* — Yes, the Lord God bids us go out and call poor, maimed, halt, blind sinners to the feast of grace, the blind who cannot see, the halt who cannot come, and the poor who have nothing to bring!

## Plenty of Room

*“And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded; and yet there is room.”* There is plenty of room in the house of grace and plenty of bread for hungry sinners. In Revelation 4 John saw twenty-four seats around the throne of God. Each of these seats were filled with the twenty-four elders sitting before the throne. They were all clothed with white garments, and they all wore crowns of pure gold on their heads. The twenty-four elders represent the whole church of God. As the twelve patriarchs represent the whole church of the Old Testament and the twelve apostles represent the whole church of the New testament, these twenty-four elders represent all of God's elect, the whole church of God, the Israel of God (Revelation 21:12-14). I call your attention to this because it must be clearly understood that every seat around the throne is filled. Not one of God's elect will be missing in that great day when Christ presents his redeemed ones in glory. Every chosen sinner, every soul for whom Christ shed His blood at Calvary, every sinner called by the efficacious, irresistible grace and power of God the Holy Spirit will be seated before the Triune Jehovah in eternal glory.

Having said that as plainly as I know how, it must be

understood and declared by all who preach the Gospel that there is plenty of room at the table of grace for any and all who come to Christ. — *“Whosoever will, let him come!”*

## Compel Them

Still, we are fully aware that none to whom we preach the Gospel will come to Christ until compelled by the irresistible grace of God the Holy Spirit in effectual calling. We read in verse 23 — *“And the Lord said unto the servant go out into the highways and hedges: and compel them to come in.”* Without question, none but God the Spirit can effectually compel lost sinners to come to the Savior. Yet, this command in the parable before us must be applied to Gospel preachers, too. Yes, we are to compel, persuade, and force sinners by the persuasive preaching of the Gospel to come to Christ (2 Corinthians 4:18-6:2).

This shows us, as John Gill rightly observed, “the nature of the Gospel ministry, which is to persuade Japheth to dwell in the tents of Shem; and the power that attends it by the Divine Spirit; the case and condition of souls, who are generally bashful and backward, judging themselves unworthy; as also the earnest desire, and great liberality of Christ, the Master of the feast.”

*“That my house may be filled”* — And filled it shall be! God’s house shall be filled with chosen, redeemed sinners, as a sheepfold filled with a flock of sheep. And each one shall be filled with grace and glory. *“And so all Israel shall be saved.”*

*“For I say unto you, that none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.”* There is an infinite, boundless provision of grace in Christ for all who want it (Isaiah 55:1; Matthew 11:28-30; John 6:37; 7:37). Christ is the Bread on the table. All who are hungry are welcome to eat. Christ is the Water of Life. All who are thirsty are welcome to drink. If you perish in your sins, if you go to hell, if you will not come to the bounteous feast of grace, you will have no one to blame but yourself. Then your lands and oxen and relations will be fuel for the fires of your everlasting torment. May God the Holy Spirit sweetly force you to come to the Lord Jesus!

# Chapter 95

## The One Issue between God and Man

### Luke 14:25-35

“And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Luke 14:25-35).

Everywhere I go in the United States and abroad I meet with men and women who see the withered, lifeless condition of the church. They know that something is wrong, both with

themselves and with the church. And they are looking for something. They know that something is missing in their own religious experience and in the church, but do not know what it is. The fact is they have never been confronted with the one issue between God and man. The preachers they hear and the churches they attend do not even know what that one issue is. Do you?

The issue between you and God is not what you do or do not do. Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that it does not matter how you live. It matters a great deal. God has told us how to live in this world. And we are responsible to obey Him. But I am saying the issue between you and God is not what you do. There are a great many people in hell today who lived much better lives than either you or me. The rich young ruler and the Pharisees stand as indisputable examples of that fact (Matthew 5:20).

The issue between you and God is not what you have felt, experienced, and done in the spiritual realm. We hear much talk these days about the baptism of the Holy Ghost, speaking in tongues, miracles, and sheer emotionalism as evidences of God's blessings and the absence of these things as an evidence of His disapproval and wrath. But that is not the case at all. In the Day of Judgment many will be damned who felt more, experienced more, and did more in what we call the spiritual realm than you or me (Matthew 7:22-23).

And the issue between you and God is not what, or how much you know and believe about the Person and work of Christ. Again, let me be understood. Doctrinal truth, Gospel knowledge is vital. You must know and believe the doctrine of the Gospel. But accurate, factual, orthodox knowledge is not salvation. A person can believe the truth about Christ and not be saved. A man can believe the doctrine of the Gospel and yet be lost. Judas Iscariot, Demas, and Diotrephes stand as glaring beacons to warn us of the fact that the issue between God and man is not what you believe.

## The Lordship of Christ

The issue between God and man is the Lordship of Christ. The issue between God and man is, who is going to be boss? Who is going to rule? Christ or you? Rolfe Barnard told a story about a young preacher he met who started a church with nine families. In a short while the congregation grew in number and caused the city where they lived to sit up and take notice. That church, Barnard said, was “A fellowship of men and women who lived in the power of the resurrection life of the risen Lord.” When Barnard asked him the secret to his ministry, the young preacher said, “Bro. Barnard, there isn’t but one message to be preached, and that is God’s eternal purpose in Jesus Christ, that on the basis of His life laid down God has purposed to set up His totalitarian rule in the hearts of men.”

What a message! If it ever penetrates our hearts, the people around us will sit up and take notice. God almighty has made Christ Lord of all things (John 17:2; Romans 14:9; Hebrews 10:10-14; Philippians 2:5-11); and He is determined to put all things under His feet, in particular to bring you and me to bow to the rule of his Son.

The one issue between God and man is the absolute Lordship of Christ. It always has been and always will be. The issue is not whether you want to go to heaven or to hell when you die. Everybody wants to go to heaven. The issue is not do you want to have peace, or do you want to live in turmoil. Everybody wants to live in peace. The issue between you and God is His Son. Will you, or will you not bow to the claims of Christ, your sovereign Lord? Everyone is going to bow, either willingly or unwillingly, either now or at the judgment seat. If you willingly bow to Christ now, that is salvation. But bow you will to Jesus Christ the Lord. God has purposed it. And God will do it. Even if he sends you to hell, God is going to put you in subjection to his Son (Isaiah 9:6-7; Ps. 110:1). This has always been the issue.

## In the Garden

This was the issue in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15-17). The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, whatever it was, was the symbol of God's dominion, His rule, His authority. When Adam ate of the fruit of that tree, he was saying, "God has no right to be God. I will not have Him to rule over me, even if I suffer His wrath forever." Remember, "*Adam was not deceived*" (1 Timothy 2:14). He knew exactly what he was doing in his rebellion; and you do too.

Your problem is not that you are ignorant, or deceived. You know your depravity, your guilt, your sinfulness. You know who God is and what God requires (righteousness and satisfaction). And you know what Christ has done for sinners. Your problem is that you will not have Christ to reign over you.

## At Calvary

This was the issue at Calvary. That mob of rebels did not crucify the Lord of Glory because they did not believe His words, but because they would not submit to His rule on His terms. They wanted to take Jesus and make Him king on their terms, a king whom they controlled (John 6:14-15). But they would not bow to His dominion and be ruled by Him. They said, "*We will not have this man to reign over us*" (Luke 19:14).

## Today

This is still the issue today. This is the issue with men, with preachers, and in churches. — Does God have the right to be God and does He exercise that right? Does God have the right to sit on His throne and do whatsoever He will? The Bible says he does. Does God exercise that right? The Bible says he does (Psalms 115:3; 135:6).

God almighty will not abdicate his throne. He will not step down. He will not quit announcing His commands, pressing His

claims and meddling with our lives. God demands that we surrender, that we give ourselves up to the rule of Christ His Son. Saving faith is nothing less than surrender to Christ the Lord. If I would be saved, I must lose my life to Christ (Mark 8:34-35): not my heart, not my soul, not my mind, not one day in seven, not a tithe, not a little time each morning and evening, but my life! Christ will not have me unless he has all of me. And He will not have you unless He has all of you (Luke 14:33).

C. H. Spurgeon said, “No man has truly given himself to Christ unless he has said, ‘My Lord, I give Thee this day my body, my soul, my powers, my talents, my goods, my house, my children, and all that I have. Henceforth, I hold them at Thy will, as a steward under Thee. Thine they are. As for me, I have nothing. I have surrendered all to Thee!’”

If we want to understand the mess we are in now, we have to understand how we got in this mess. It all began in the Garden of Eden. When Adam, with his eyes fully open, ate the forbidden fruit, two things happened. First, God’s throne was threatened by his creature. If Adam had won, had he gotten his way, God would have been out of business. God would have ceased to rule the world. And if the sons of Adam had their way today, God would cease to rule. But that cannot be. God will never give up his dominion.

Second, man lost his wholeness. The Scriptures speak of the “*natural man*.” That is man in his fallen condition. The natural man is out of kilter. He is depraved, beside himself. He must be brought to himself, or he will never be reconciled to God. As the insane prodigal had to return to the rule of his father’s house before he could enjoy the peace of his father’s house, so we must return to the rule of God, we must bow to the dominion of Christ, before we can be made whole. The throne rights of King Jesus have to be settled and acknowledged in our hearts.

Barnard said, “Man’s wholeness was lost in Eden. Man was made to be governed. And there’s never been any government placed on anybody’s shoulders, except Jesus Christ’s! ‘*The government shall be upon his shoulder*’ (Isaiah 9:6). This whole outfit has been turned over to him. Nobody now has the right to

make the decisions except Christ.” If ever we come to know Christ the Lord, we will surrender everything to his dominion.

## Christ Must Reign

One of these days God is going to accomplish His purpose. It is written of the Lord Jesus, “*He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet*” (1 Corinthians 15:25). Sooner or later, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:8-11). That is the Father’s decree (Psalm 110). That is what the Father promised the Son in the covenant (Psalm 2:8). That is the reward of our Savior’s obedience (John 17:1-2; Romans 14:9). That is the end for which all things were made (Revelation 4) and shall be the everlasting delight of His saints (Revelation 5). Therefore, “*He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet!*”

The one issue between God and man is the dominion of Christ. Who is going to be boss? Man was made to be governed. An ungoverned man is an incomplete man. The only way man can be made complete is by being ruled. The personality of manhood was designed for something greater than a self-centered animal existence. Man was not made to be alone, to live unto himself, but to be lost in the purpose of God. We were made to serve God! Only in His service can we find perfect freedom. Sin is slavery. Rebellion is bondage. To be free, we must be brought under the yoke and dominion of the Son of God. Salvation is nothing less than the restoration of God’s throne in the heart of man.

## Our Threefold Message

If the one issue between God and man is the rule and dominion of Christ as Lord, what must our message to man be? Every Gospel preacher is an ambassador of the King of heaven and earth. God has sent each with a message to proclaim to rebels throughout His kingdom. And that message is threefold.

First, God sends His servants to declare that Jesus Christ, His Son, is the Lord and King of the universe (2 Corinthians 4:5; Acts 2:36-38). The message of the gospel is not a proposal, a plan, or a proposition, but a Person, Jesus Christ the Lord. God has not sent me to define and defend a doctrine, but to proclaim a Person. To preach the gospel is to preach Him for whom, through whom, and in whom God has purposed to fulfill all things.

The message which the Apostles preached, by which they turned the world upside down was the Lordship of Christ (Acts 2:36). They went everywhere preaching Jesus and the resurrection<sup>18</sup>. The whole creation shall soon be brought in subjection to His throne. God is going to redeem this world. He is going to restore everything to the rule of Christ (Ephesians 1:10). The Gospel is the story of how that God has put all his purposes in Christ. It is as broad as Christ and as narrow as Christ. It shuts the door of hope everywhere, except in Christ. In Christ alone the door is open. He is the Door.

The issue of the hour is man's rebellion to God's throne. And the message of the Gospel is Christ Jesus the Lord, the person in whom God has established and will establish His dominion over His creatures. To be saved is to be in agreement with God's purpose. To be lost is to be in rebellion to God's purpose. To be reconciled to God is to be reconciled to His revelation, to His righteousness, to His redemption, and to His rule.

Second, the message of the gospel is a word of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). To be saved is to be converted to the rule of God in Christ. To be saved is to be reconciled to the rule of God in Christ. Salvation is the free consent of my heart to the sovereign throne of almighty God. Sin is much more than an act. It is a condition, a condition of rebellion against the sovereign rule of Christ. And salvation is much more than an act. It is a condition, a condition of reconciliation to the sovereign dominion of God in Christ. The message of reconciliation is redemption

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18 In the Book of Acts the words "*preach,*" *preaching,*" and "*preached*" are used 37 times. In every place where those words are found the subject preached was Christ the Lord.

fully accomplished by Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). The condition of reconciliation is surrender, unconditional surrender to the rule of Christ. That is what faith is. Faith believes the record God has given of His Son. And faith acts upon that belief. Faith is belief in action. Salvation is conversion to God. It is the life-long pursuit of God, His will, and His glory.

Third, the message of the Gospel is a message of God's rule restored. I know that God rules everywhere and in all things now. He always has and always will. But one of these days, God is going to put down all rebellion and bring everything in captivity to the rule of Christ (Revelation 19:1-6).

## Two Kinds of Faith

There are two kinds of faith. There is a faith that centers in me, and what I can get from God. And there is a faith that centers in God and His glory. If my faith is primarily concerned with me, and what I want, then the object of my faith is me. I really worship myself. If my faith is primarily concerned with God and his glory, then God is the Object of my faith. I worship Him. Martin Luther once defined salvation as "the realization of God's will and purpose, whatever it might be, rather than the satisfaction of human need." He saw that true faith is not seeking something from God, but bowing to the rule of God. Calvin said, "True faith is having confidence in God, regardless of profit or loss." It is the heart's willing affirmation of God's right to be God. This is the one issue between God and man. That is exactly what our Lord Jesus Christ asserts in Luke 14:26-33.

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began

to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

If we would have Christ, we must surrender all to Him. Christianity, true Christianity, true saving faith involves a total surrender to Christ the Lord. Either you will be a servant under the dominion of King Jesus, voluntarily giving up all to His claims, or you will go to hell. You may not have to give up anything in actuality. But surrender to Christ must be just as real and complete in your heart as if you had actually given up everything, even down to life itself. Our Lord Jesus Christ requires total and unreserved surrender to himself. Christ will be Lord of all, or he will not be Lord at all. Is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, your Lord? Is he truly your Lord?

That is the one issue between God and man.

# Chapter 96

## Lost and Found

### Luke 15:1-32

“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them” (Luke 15:1-32).

This chapter and the message it contains needs no introduction. The chapter opens with publicans and sinners gathering around the Son of God to hear His words of mercy and grace, and with Pharisees and Scribes griping about it (vv. 1-2). These two groups of men always brought out our Savior’s deepest emotions. Publicans and sinners evoked His tenderness, compassion, mercy, love, and grace. Whenever and wherever we see publicans and sinners coming to Him, we see the Friend of sinners joyously engaged in ministering to them. Pharisees and scribes evoked open displays of utter contempt, anger, and wrath. Our Master simply could not stomach self-righteous, religious legalists. He never stayed in their company very long. They didn’t like Him; and He didn’t like them. He scorned them, rebuked them, derided them, and condemned them at every opportunity. Then He departed from them.

I suppose we should be grateful to the Pharisees for having led our Lord to utter the trilogy of parables we are about to read. Luke tells us plainly that these three parables, as we commonly speak of them, are really one parable. “*He spake this parable unto them.*” In this trilogy of parables, we see the whole work of grace, the whole work of the Triune God in saving lost sinners. The lost sheep shows us the work of Christ, the Son of God, our

Good Shepherd, in bringing His elect home to God. The lost coin shows us the work of God the Holy Spirit seeking and finding that which was lost. The prodigal son, the lost son, shows us the wondrous grace and goodness of God the Father in receiving sinners for Christ's sake.

## The Lost Sheep

“And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” (Luke 15:3-7).

What piercing words these must have been to the Pharisees and scribes, who thought they needed no repentance! How sweet they sound in the ears of poor publicans and sinners, who know both that they must have repentance and that they cannot produce it!

Here is a blessed, instructive description of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in redemption. All God's elect are sheep, chosen of God and given to Christ as the Good Shepherd, but ever straying from Him, lost in the wilderness of fallen humanity. Christ came into this world after His sheep. He seeks each of His sheep until He finds it. When He finds his sheep, He lays it upon His broad, omnipotent shoulders and carries it all the way home. And when He gets home with His sheep there is joy in heaven over every sinner “*that repenteth.*” Be sure you don't miss this: The repentance here is not something the sheep does, but something the Shepherd does for the sheep, in the sheep, and with the sheep. He turns the sheep homeward; and He carries the sheep home, all the way home!

## The Lost Coin

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:8-10).

Here we see another part of God’s great work of grace. This woman shows us the work of God the Holy Spirit in omnipotent mercy and effectual grace. Unlike the sheep, the coin is an inanimate thing, a thing altogether without life, feeling, or ability, but very precious to the one who has lost it. As such, this lost coin shows a picture of God’s elect in this world, “*dead in trespasses and sins,*” until God steps in to save (Ephesians 2:1-5).

When God the Holy Spirit comes in grace, He lights the candle of the Gospel, causing “*the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ*” to shine in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). When you sweep a house that has been in darkness for a long time, you stir up a lot of dust. And when God the Holy Spirit performs His mighty operation of grace, he stirs our souls with the broom of conviction. And there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over every repenting sinner. Again, the repentance here is not a work performed by the coin, but the work of God the Holy Spirit finding the coin.

## The Lost Son

In verses 11-24 we see the very familiar story of the prodigal son. Usually, the emphasis is placed upon the son’s rebellion. But our Lord’s purpose in this third part of His parable is to show us the marvelous lovingkindness, infinite mercy, and wondrous grace of God in receiving sinners for Christ’s sake. Here is another picture of God’s elect in their fallen, lost condition by nature. We are all by nature straying sheep, as dead and lifeless as a coin, and

utterly profligate rebels. Let's read verses 11-24.

“And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry” (Luke 15:11-24).

Here is a needy sinner coming to the throne of grace. Here is God waiting to be gracious. Here is the blessed reception of grace. When poor sinners come home to God, when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, not only does the Lord God run to greet us, fall on our necks and kiss us, He freely gives every repenting sinner all the fulness of His bounteous free grace in Christ Jesus: — Kisses of Love — A Robe of Righteousness — Shoes of Stability — A Ring (Seal) of Sonship — A Slain Sacrifice to Feast Upon

— and An Unceasing Celebration of Mercy!

## The Elder Brother

But the parable does not end here. The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son were all designed to give hope to those poor publicans and sinners who come to the Savior. The rest of the parable seems specifically intended to condemn the Pharisees and scribes of all ages. They are depicted by the prodigal's elder brother in verses 25-32.

“Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.” (Luke 15:25-32)

This elder brother is not in the house, but in the field. He refuses to come into the house. He is a slave wearing the name of a son. He is self-righteous. He despises the sacrifice, the robe, and the father. He is full of envy. He has all the ordinances of the father's house, but none of the blessedness.

Perhaps the most wondrous and most mysterious aspect of this great parable is the way it closes. Only in eternity will we see the fulness of this closing verse manifest. In verse 32 we read — *“It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”*

Here God the Father speaks of Himself, all the angels of heaven, and every saved sinner, represented in this prodigal, making merry and being glad, because though we were dead He has given us life, and though we were lost He has found us!

Did He not promise “*I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth*”? He did indeed (Zephaniah 3:18-20). So it shall be in that great day that is yet to come (Zephaniah 3:14-17; Ephesians 2:1-7).

# Chapter 97

## The Parable of the Unjust Steward

Luke 16:1-13

“And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. 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 ye

have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:1-13).

## An Illustration

Remember that parables are earthly illustrations of heavenly truths. We do not build our doctrine upon parables. We do not interpret the rest of the Bible in the light of the Lord's parables. We build our doctrine upon the plain statements of Holy Scripture. And we interpret the parables of our Lord in the light of the whole Volume of Inspiration.

A parable must not be forced beyond its purpose. The purpose of a parable is to illustrate one primary thing. It has one central message. It is not necessary to give every word of the parable a spiritual or doctrinal meaning. In order to understand it, we must look at the parable as a whole, and seek to determine what its primary message is. In this parable the certain rich man represents the Lord our God. The rich man's steward represents us all. We are all, in a sense, stewards of God. The message taught in this parable is this: — As the stewards of God, you and I are responsible to wisely use what God has put into our hands for His glory and for our own eternal good. This unjust steward was not commended for his injustice, but for his wisdom and great care in using his present circumstances to provide for himself in the future.

Someone has suggested that this world is a house. Heaven is the roof of the house. The stars are its lights. The earth, with its fruits, is a table spread by the Master of the house, who is the great and glorious Lord God. Man is the steward of the house, into whose hands God has given all the goods of His house for a time. It is the steward's responsibility to use his Master's goods

wisely for the honor of his Master, and according to his Master's will. In the Day of Judgment we will be called to give an account of our stewardship.

The message of this parable is a subject of indescribable importance. It is deeper than election, more profound than predestination, and more difficult to receive than Divine sovereignty. You and I are stewards under God, responsible to use what He has put into our hands for the good of His people and the glory of His name, according to His will. If we learn nothing else from this parable, I want us to learn this: — Everything (money, material possessions, time, talents, opportunities, family — everything!) we have in this world belongs to God. We are only the stewards of God's property for a while. He allows us to use that which is His. But it is our responsibility to use it for His glory and according to His direction.

## The Parable Itself

First, we will briefly look at the parable itself (vv. 1-8).

“And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord

commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” (Luke 16:1-8)

Here our Lord holds before us a wicked, self-serving, unjust steward. His master trusted him with the goods of his house. But this man used his office and position to cheat his master and his master’s debtors and served himself. As stated above, this unjust steward represents all men and women. God made man to serve Him with His creation and honor Him. But we have taken that which belongs to God and used it for ourselves. We have all attempted to rob God, both of His dominion and His dignity as God.

It is not accidental that this parable immediately follows the Lord’s story of the elder brother and the parable by which he rebuked the Pharisees and scribes in Luke 15. I am certain that the Pharisees understood both that parable and this one as specifically speaking of them, because they took offense at it (v. 16).

Here are *four things* that the Lord specifically tells us about this unjust steward...

1. “*He wasted his lord’s goods*” (v. 1). — This steward embezzled his master’s goods, misapplied them, or through carelessness lost them. And for this he was accused before his master. This is the charge laid against us all. We have taken that which God has given us to use for His glory, His Son, and His people and wasted it upon our own pleasures.

2. Because he had wasted his lord’s goods, this steward was given notice that he would soon be put out of his stewardship (v. 2). — In a little while he would be required to give up his stewardship and give account of himself to his master. Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke these words against the Pharisees; but He spoke them to His disciples. They are written for our learning. What do they teach us?

Soon we will be compelled to give up our stewardship. Our Lord tells us to “*work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.*” We will not always enjoy the privileges and

pleasures that are now ours. Death will soon come. When it does it will deprive us of the abilities and opportunities we now have of serving Christ and His people. And when we are gone another steward will come to take our place. We will soon be forgotten.

Our discharge from our stewardship is a matter of justice. We must die because we have sinned. We have wasted our Lord's goods. Therefore, we have forfeited our stewardship. When the Lord takes it from us, we have no grounds for complaint.

When our stewardship is taken from us, we must give account of it to our Lord (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10-11). Having been warned of these things, if we were wise, we would make preparation for that great day. He is a wise man who says to himself continually, "*Prepare to meet thy God.*" Soon we must stand before God to give account of our stewardship.

3. As soon as this unjust steward realized that his stewardship was to be taken from him, he began to make preparations for the appointed day (vv. 3-7). — He used the time and opportunities he had to prepare for that appointed day when his stewardship would be taken away. We would be wise to think upon that day. We have been warned. Soon God will take us out of this world. Soon we will stand before God in judgment. We are fools if we do not prepare for that day.

He realized that he had no ability to earn his livelihood and that he was too proud to beg. — "*Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed*" (v. 3). He could not dig because he would not dig. He was not willing to lower himself to what he looked upon as menial labor. He was not too proud to steal. But he was too proud to work! He was too lazy to work and too proud to beg. Both work and humility were contrary to his nature.

Spiritually, you and I are in the same position he was in. We cannot, by the works of our hands, save our souls. We have neither the will nor the ability to obey God's law. — "*By the works of the law there shall no flesh be justified.*" "*Man is not justified by the works of the law.*" Salvation is by grace. It cannot

be earned or won by works. Salvation is the free gift of God's free grace in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9). But there is another problem – We are all too proud by nature to beg for mercy. We are too proud to come to God like the publican upon the footing of free grace through a Substitute (Luke 18:13). We are too proud to seek grace through the merits of another.

Though he was too lazy to work and too proud to beg, this unjust steward determined that he would make friends of his lord's debtors, so that when he was turned out of his master's house he might be received into theirs. This unjust steward was a treacherous, dishonest man. But he was brilliant in one thing. He used the opportunity he had to prepare for his future welfare.

“I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.” (Luke 16:4-7)

4. In verse 8 the Lord Jesus tells us that the unjust steward's master commended his behavior. — “And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.”

This is a strange commendation. His lord did not commend him because he had done the things he had done, but because he had wisely provided for himself. Dishonest as he was, by lessening the bills of his master's debtors he made for himself friends. Wicked as he was in his deeds, he had an eye to the future. Disgraceful as his actions were, he provided well for himself. He did not sit still in idleness and wait to be reduced to poverty. He schemed, planned, contrived, and found a way to secure a future home for himself.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus said, “*The children of this world*

*are in their generation wiser than the children of light.*” Do you see the contrast? This man, with regard to earthly things, was diligent. He wisely looked to and provided for the future. This is commendable even in insects and animals (Proverbs 6:6-9; 30:24-28). But, as John Trapp observed, “The worldling’s wisdom serves him (as the ostrich’s wings) to make him outrun others upon earth, and in earthly things; but helps him never a wit toward heaven.”

## Spiritual Things

Without question, the Book of Proverbs is a book of inspired wisdom drawn from earthly maxims. But the maxims, as given by Solomon, under divine inspiration are not about carnal matters. They are about spiritual matters. Solomon is not telling us how to lay up treasures upon the earth. That would be a direct contradiction to our Lord’s word in Matthew 6. Solomon’s purpose is to tell us show the necessity of laying up treasure in heaven.

Yet, how foolish we are to neglect our souls! In this regard the unjust steward sets before us an example we would be wise to follow. Like him, we should look to the future (2 Corinthians 4:18). We would be wise to make provision for that day when we shall have to leave our present habitation and secure for ourselves, by faith in Christ, “*an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*” We should use every means at our disposal to secure our everlasting welfare.

J. C. Ryle wrote, “The diligence of worldly men about the things of time should put to shame the coldness of professing Christians about the things of eternity.” They improve their opportunities. We waste ours. They redeem their time. We squander ours. They seize the moment to increase their riches. We live as if we expect to live here forever, as though there were no eternal riches in glory.

## Christ's Exhortation

Second, I want us to understand the exhortation our Lord Jesus gives us in verse 9. The parable ends in verse 8. Verses 9-13 are words of instruction to you and me, by which our Savior pointedly applies the parable to us. — *“And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations”* (v. 9).

This is the meaning of our Lord's words in this verse — Make to yourselves friends with your money and earthly goods, so that when you die, you may enter into everlasting habitations. Use your earthly goods, as stewards under God, with an eye to the future. Use your riches in this world in such a way that they shall be friends to you and not a witness against you in the Day of Judgment.

Lest any mistake what I am saying, or what our Lord is teaching in this verse, let this be perfectly understood. — No man can purchase an eternal inheritance in heaven with money, any more than he can earn it by his works. Our only grounds of acceptance with God, is the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-21). Your earthly riches cannot get you into heaven, no matter what you do with them. But your earthly riches can keep you out of heaven (Matthew 13:22; Luke 18:22-24). It is our responsibility not to serve our earthly possessions, but rather to use our earthly possessions to serve our God, His people, and His gospel. All that we have belongs to God and is to be used for God. We are nothing but stewards. A steward takes in with one hand and distributes with the other according to his master's will (Matthew 6:19-21, 33). We were not put here to amass wealth, but to use what God puts in our hands for the glory of Christ and the good of His people.

The doctrine our Lord teaches us by this parable is unmistakable. — The proper use of our earthly goods, from the proper motives, will be for our eternal benefit. It is an evidence of God's grace in us, which shall befriend our souls forever. God the Holy Spirit has given us three inspired commentaries on our

Lord's exhortation in Luke 16:9.

“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days” (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:7-10).

“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

“And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations” (Luke 16:9).

### Faithful, or Unfaithful?

Third, our Lord gives us the basis of this exhortation and enforces it in verses 10-12. If we do not make good use of God's temporal gifts of providence, we need not expect Him to bestow upon us the true riches of spiritual and everlasting grace and glory. — *“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”* (v. 10).

The riches of this world are called that which is least. Men think riches are great, significant, and all-important. Our Lord

calls riches that which is least, the very least of all God's gifts to man. The spiritual riches, the riches of grace and glory are much, infinitely, immeasurably much. These are "*the unsearchable riches of Christ*" (Ephesians 3:8) and "*God's riches in glory by Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:19).

Matthew Henry said, "God withholds His grace from covetous worldly people more than we are aware of." And our Lord said virtually the same thing in Luke 18:25.

*"If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?"* (. 11)

— The riches of this world are deceitful and uncertain. They are "*the unrighteous mammon.*" Spiritual riches are "*true riches*". I wonder if we really believe that. Those who are rich in faith are truly rich. Those who are rich in grace are infinitely rich. Those who are rich towards God are permanently rich. Those who are rich in Christ are perfectly rich and rich in all things (1 Corinthians 3:21). In Christ all providential things are ours, all temporal things are ours, all gracious things are ours, all spiritual things are ours, and all eternal things are ours.

*"And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"* (v. 12) — The riches of this world are another man's. They all belong to God. We are only stewards of them, who use them for a very little while. Then, we must leave them to another. Spiritual, eternal riches are our own. They are that good part which shall not be taken away from us, neither in this world nor in the world to come. That which God has imputed to me is mine forever. That which he imparts to my soul can never be separated from me. It is my very own forever. Christ's righteousness is our righteousness (Jeremiah 33:16). His reward is our reward (Colossians 1:12). His inheritance is our inheritance (Romans 8:17). And His glory is our glory (John 17:20).

## Little Things

In these verses, our Lord plainly shows us the importance of

faithfulness in little things. He is showing us that little things are the truest tests of character. A man who will steal a dime will rob a bank, if he thinks he can get by with it. A woman who will gossip about you would murder you, if she could. A person who is not faithful in little things is really unfaithful in all things. And he certainly is not an heir of heavenly things. Yet, it must be understood that faithfulness is not measured by acts but by lives. David failed greatly in some areas; but he was a faithful steward in God's house.

### Our Lord's Lesson

Fourth, our Savior sets before us a lesson we must learn. — *“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”* (v. 13). As Matthew Henry rightly observed, “We have no other way to prove ourselves the servants of God than by giving up ourselves so entirely to His service as to make mammon, that is, all our worldly gain, serviceable to us in His service.”

**If we love the world** and seek to hold on to the things of the world, we will hate God and despise His grace. Our worship of, service to, and faith in God will be made to be subservient to our worldly interests. We will use the things of God to serve the world.

**If we love God** and seek to hold on to Him, serving His kingdom and His glory, His Son and His Gospel, then we will hate the world and despise all that it offers. That simply means, when the world comes into competition with God, we throw the world away and hold our God and Savior (Luke 14:25-33). We make our business and worldly interests subservient to the worship of, obedience to, and service for our God. We make the things of the world to be neither more nor less than instruments with which we serve the Lord our God.

*“Ye cannot serve God and mammon!”* So I say to you as Joshua did to Israel of old, — *“How long halt ye between two*

*opinions?... Choose you this day whom ye will serve.” As for me and my house, I have made up my mind, “We will serve the Lord!”*

“And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul” (Mark 8:34-37)?

# Chapter 98

## “That Which is Highly Esteemed Among Men”

Luke 16:13-18

“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. And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery” (Luke 16:13-18).

### Single Heart

The Lord Jesus concluded His parable of the unjust steward with these words, “*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*” (v. 13). The lesson He here declares is unmistakable: — If we would worship and serve our God, we must worship Him and serve Him with a single, undivided heart.

*“The LORD looketh on the heart.”* In all things concerning faith in Christ, obedience to our God, and worship, the heart is the principle thing (Proverbs4:23; 23:26). — *“The Lord looketh on the heart.”* *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart”* He will not despise. The one thing He requires of all who come to Him in faith is the heart, a sincere, single, undivided heart. The heart was the one thing lacking in the rich young ruler. The heart was the thing the Scribes and Pharisees would not give. The heart is the one thing none will give to God, except the Lord God create a broken, contrite, single, undivided heart in us by His omnipotent grace. Faith in Christ is the surrender of myself to Him. It is giving up my life to Him. Faith in Christ is not a partial consecration, but the entire consecration of myself to my God. Read the Scriptures for yourself and understand the doctrine of Christ. Where there is no consecration, there is no conversion. Where there is no surrender, there is no salvation. Where there is no voluntary bowing to Christ as Lord, there is no knowledge of Christ as Savior (Luke 14:26-33; Mark 8:34-37).

The plain and simple fact is “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.” We are not the servants of God, we do not trust Christ as our Lord, if we do not give up ourselves so entirely to His service as to make mammon, that is, all our worldly gain, serviceable to His kingdom, His will, and His glory.

If we love the world and seek to hold on to the things of the world, we will hate God and despise His grace. Our worship of, service to, and faith in God will be made to be subservient to our worldly interests. We will use the things of God to serve the world.

If we love God and seek to hold on to Him, serving His kingdom and His glory, His Son and His gospel, then we will hate the world and despise all that it offers. That simply means that when the world comes into competition with God, we throw the world away and hold our God and Savior. We make our business and worldly interests subservient to the worship of,

obedience to, and service for our God. We make the things of the world to be neither more nor less than instruments with which we serve the Lord God.

It is a useless show of hypocrisy to claim that we are worshippers and servants of God, when in reality we only serve ourselves. God in heaven cannot be served with a divided heart. That fact is so obviously revealed in the New Testament that dispute regarding it would seem to be unthinkable. Yet, multitudes in this world try to do the thing our Master declares is impossible. They try to be friends of the world and friends of God at the same time.

Does that describe you? Your conscience forces you to be religious. But your heart is chained to earthly things. You live in constant unrest. You have too much religion to be happy in the world and too much of the world in your heart to be happy in religion. You labor to do that which cannot be done. You are striving to “*serve God and mammon.*”

Whole-hearted, decisive faith is what our Lord requires. Whole-hearted, decisive faith is the key to contentment and peace in this world. Half-heartedness brings up an evil report of the good land and of God’s promise. Whole-hearted faith in Christ, like Caleb, is of another spirit and follows the Lord fully, saying, — “*The Lord will bring us into this land and give it to us.*”

“The more entirely we live, not to ourselves, but to Him who died for us, the more powerfully shall we realize what it is to have ‘*joy and peace in believing*’ (Romans 15:13). If it is worthwhile to serve Christ at all, let us serve Him with all our heart, and soul, and mind and strength...If we cannot make up our minds to give up everything for Christ's sake, we must not expect Christ to own us at the last day. He will have all our hearts or none. “*Whoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God*’ (James 4:4). The end of undecided and half-hearted Christians will be to be cast out forever.”

(J. C. Ryle)

## Sneering Religionists

When the Scribes and Pharisees heard our Lord's parable of the unjust steward and the conclusion He drew from it, "*they derided Him.*" These lost religionists turned up their noses in contempt at our Savior's doctrine. — "*And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided Him*" (v. 14).

When the Pharisees, a money-loving, money-obsessed bunch of religionists, heard the Master say these things, they rolled their eyes, dismissing Him as hopelessly out of touch. These covetous men, these lovers of the world, turned up their noses, made faces at the Son of God, and sneered at Him. They laughed and scoffed at His doctrine. These men professed to be, and everyone highly regarded them as being lovers of God; but that which was the master passion of their hearts was the love of the world. "These men", wrote G. Campbell Morgan, "were filled with scorn for this poor, Galilean peasant who talked like that about money. To them, the teaching Jesus had been giving was so preposterous that they could not restrain their mockery."

There are many in pulpits and churches around the world today of the same opinion. They are moral. They are religious. But they tell us that such things as our Lord here emphatically declares are not practical. What blasphemy there is in the use of that word "practical"! When religious people talk about "being practical," "teaching practical things," practical doctrine," and "practical godliness," what they usually mean is: — "We've heard enough about Christ and His Gospel. That no longer appeals to us!" When they talk about devotion and consecration to the Son of God as something "excessive" and "impractical," they are only attempting to cover their own rebellion, self-interests, and love of the world. Nothing in all the world is more reasonable and practical than the whole-hearted consecration of our lives to our God and Savior (Romans 12:1-2). That man or woman who loves the world, no matter how religious he or she may be, betray themselves by the object of their affection (1 John 2:15-17).

## A Biting Reply

The Master had already stung their consciences. They knew He had been talking about them. And, now in verse 15 our Savior gives a biting reply to their sneers. God sees right through the mask of hypocrisy. He knows every man's heart. — *“And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”*

Hiding behind the mask of religious devotion, these men passed themselves off as being great lovers of God and of His law. But their religion was nothing but a mask to hide their covetousness, their love of all that can be gained in this world. Here, our Lord unmasked the Pharisees publicly. In essence, He is saying, “You are masters at making yourselves look good in front of others, but God knows what's behind the appearance. What society sees and calls “monumental,” God sees through and calls “monstrous.” In doing so, He gives us two, sobering lessons, if we have ears to hear them.

1. “God knoweth your hearts.”
2. “That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God”

That which is high in the estimation of men is an abomination in the sight of God. That is to say, those who attempt to justify themselves by their works, ever making a show of religion and godliness before men, are a stench in the nostrils of God in heaven, who knows their hearts.

They are a stench in His nostrils, and all their religion is a stench in His nostrils. Their religion and holiness, their devotion and ceremonies, their zeal and their prayers are a stench to God! Everything by which they gain the applause of men as “holy, devoted, godly people,” everything by which they gain the world they covet is an abomination to God.

What was our Lord referring to here? Did He have anything specific in mind? Hear His own words and see...

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be

seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.” (Matthew 6:1-4)

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.” (Matthew 6:5-8)

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” (Matthew 6:16-18)

“Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they

*themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren.” (Matthew 23:1-8)

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.” (Matthew 23:15)

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. *Ye* blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.” (Matthew 23:23-25)

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” (Matthew 23:27-28)

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. *Ye* serpents, *ye*

generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:29-33)

God's opinion of a man's goodness and his own opinion of his goodness are not quite the same. Your opinion of your righteousness and God's opinion of it are as different as heaven and hell (Isaiah 1:10-15; 65:2-5). God loves what men despise: mercy, grace, lovingkindness, and faith. And men love what God despises: a form of godliness, a religious show, and the praise of men.

"Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and *men* will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself. He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man *that is* in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts *that* perish." (Psalm 49:16-20)

## Legalists and the Law

In verses 16-18 our Lord exposes the legalists' contempt for God's holy law. While all legalists denounce as antinomian those faithful men who proclaim the believer's complete freedom from the law (Romans 6:14-15; 7:4; 8:1-4; 10:4; Galatians 5:1-4; Colossians 2:8, 16, 20), the fact is all who claim to live by the law would destroy the law. It is the legalist who is the antinomian, the one who is against the law.

All who want you to believe that they are holy, that they live by the law of God and make themselves holy by their obedience to God really despise the law and endeavor to destroy it by lowering it to their level. This is exactly what our Lord charged against the Pharisees and all their followers in these three verses.

Legalists love to show their obedience to the law, though they despise it inwardly. How often we hear legalists say, "If I didn't believe I was still under the law, I could go out and live any way I wanted to." With such assertions they betray their hatred of the

law; and by their own words they are judged. Believers delight in the law after the inward man.

## A New Age

Our Savior declares in verse 16 that the law and the prophets have now been fulfilled and a new age has begun. — *“The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.”*

In the strictest sense, the law and the prophets were not fulfilled until Christ died and rose again. But John the Baptist appeared as the forerunner of the Christ, preparing the way before Him, announcing the beginning of this present Gospel age. Since the day John the Baptist pointed to Him and cried, *“Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,”* the types and shadows of the law have been fulfilled.

The kingdom of God no longer has any connection with meats, and drinks, and ceremonies, and bondage. It is not outward, but inward. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17). In this Gospel age we do not call men and women to duties and ceremonies, but to Christ himself, preaching the kingdom of God.

The law portrayed eternal things in the words of temporal things and spiritual things by carnal things. The Gospel deals only with the spiritual and the eternal. The old things of the legal age have passed away. We are no longer looking for a kingdom to come, but proclaiming a kingdom established, and pressing men and women into it. The Church of God is the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom established by Christ, a Kingdom established upon righteousness, a Kingdom of which Christ is the King, a Kingdom of grace, and an everlasting Kingdom.

## Pressing In

In the last line of verse 16 we read, *“the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.”* What do those words

mean? Certainly, our Lord does not mean for us to understand that all men are trying to get into His kingdom. These Pharisees weren't! They not only would not enter the kingdom, they did everything they could to block others from entering, just as our modern religionists do by their traditions, ceremonies, altar calls, scripted prayers, and displays of piety.

So what does it mean? The word translated "*presseth*" in verse 16 is used in only one other place in the New Testament (Matthew 11:12). It means, as it is translated in Matthew, "*suffereth violence.*" Everyone who enters the Kingdom of God strives to enter in at the strait gate. He strives against all the religion and religious duties, against all the saying of prayers and doing of penance, against all the laws and ceremonies, by which lost religionists would keep them from Christ.

## Word Fulfilled

In verse 17 our Lord declares that the Word of God stands and must be fulfilled in every detail. "*And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.*" Apply these words to the Mosaic law or to the whole of divine revelation in the Old Testament, or to both. They mean exactly the same thing. Our Lord is here declaring, lest any foolishly say (as many do) that since they are fulfilled, the law and the prophets have been destroyed. Fulfilled is not destroyed, but fulfilled. As all the law was exactly fulfilled, so every Word of God stands forever. Not one word written in the Book of God shall fall to the ground. God's Word is sure and unalterable!

With regard to God's holy law, the preaching of the Kingdom of God (the preaching of the Gospel) does not lessen it, or destroy it. Not at all! The preaching of the Gospel maintains the utter severity, strictness, and justice of the law, and its fulfillment by Christ as our Substitute (Romans 3:24-26; 8:1-4; 9:33-10:4).

## Committeth Adultery

To enforce what He says in verse 17, our Lord declares to these self-righteous, self-serving, mean-spirited legalists that the specific law they were most flagrantly guilty of perverting, violating and trying to destroy means exactly the same thing today as it did when Moses wrote it in Deuteronomy 24. — *“Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery”* (v. 18).

The Word of God is crystal clear. Marriage is the lifelong union of a man and a woman (Genesis 1:27; 24). Any man or woman who breaks that union, except upon the grounds of or because of adultery or abandonment (Matthew. 5:31-32; 19:1-9; 1 Corinthians 7:15), and marries another commits adultery.

The Pharisees were flagrant in their disregard of God’s law in this regard. The famous rabbi Hillel, who lived during the days of Herod I, asserted that a man had the right to divorce his wife if she burned his food! Another rabbi (Akiba) taught that a man could divorce his wife if he found a woman who was prettier!

So commonly and easily did the Pharisees divorce their wives and marry another that when our Lord’s disciples heard what He had to say about it, they were shocked. They said, *“If the case of the man be so with his wife,”* if a man cannot put away his wife for any and every cause as the Pharisees do (Matthew 19:3), *“it is not good to marry”* (Matthew 19:10).

Does that sound familiar? All this looseness and laxity, all this contempt for God’s law was promoted by men who pretended to be lovers of it and zealous for it, while they lowered it to their own level. In reality, they were men who simply used religion and God and the Bible to gratify their own lusts, promote their own praise, and secure their high esteem in the eyes of men.

### Why here?

Many seem to have great difficulty trying to figure out why the Lord Jesus said what He did in verse 18 in this context. They think it is out of place, that it has nothing to do with the parable

in verses 1-13, the comments in verses 14-17, or the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in verses 19-31.

They are all mistaken. In verse 18 our Lord sticks His finger right on the ever-swelling chest of every proud legalist, exposing his hypocrisy, and says, “Like the unjust steward, you live for yourself. Your religion, your great piety, that you think will get you into heaven is carrying you rapidly, headlong into hell. And, soon, you who are so rich in your own eyes will lift up your eyes in hell and see all God’s poor Lazarus’s, all these publicans and sinners who trust Me alone for acceptance with God, these who come to Me at Mercy’s open gate as poor, needy beggars seeking grace, these who feed with Me at the Father’s bounteous table, these you will see in all the riches of heavenly glory with Me. Then, then, you will remember your imaginary riches and good things to the everlasting torment of your souls.”

Hear the words of the Son of God and flee to Him for mercy, trusting Him alone as your righteousness. — *“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5:20). Oh, poor, guilty, needy sinner, come to Christ as a filthy, empty handed, naked beggar and find in Him the righteousness that God requires. Everything God requires is in Him. And God gives it freely to all who need it (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

# Chapter 99

## Seven Lessons Learned Too Late

### Luke 16:19-31

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 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 tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not

Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:19-31).

The Lord Jesus is continuing to address religious Pharisees, those who justify themselves before men. He said to them in verse 15, — *“Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”*

These are the people to whom the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son was spoken in chapter 15. In that parable they are described as the elder brother who despised the goodness and grace of God, by which poor sinners are saved. They scorned the Lord Jesus saying, *“This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them”* (15:2). It is specifically to all who attempt to justify themselves before men, to all who despise the grace of God in Christ that the story in Luke 16:19-31 is addressed.

## A Great Change

The first thing we see in this parable is the fact that eternity brings about a great change. Things were not the same for the rich man after he died; and things were not the same for Lazarus (vv. 19-24). The Lord Jesus tells us, *“There was a certain rich man,”* a certain, notable, distinguished man, who thought himself rich before God and was highly esteemed as such, *“which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day,”* a man who never had a trouble in his soul. — *“And there was a certain,”* poor, helpless *“beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,”* full of trouble, *“And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried,”* and was forgotten. — *“And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 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 tormented in this flame.”*

What great changes are made when breath is taken from our bodies! Here are two men. One was very rich, and the other very poor. The one “*fared sumptuously every day.*” The other was a “*beggar...full of sores,*” who had nothing that he could call his own. Yet, it was Lazarus, the poor beggar, who possessed all things, who was born of God, and had true riches in Christ. The rich man though clothed in purple and fine linen (long robes, showing himself to be a distinctly righteous man) had nothing. Lazarus, the poor man, lived by faith and walked in the steps of Abraham. The rich man was a thoughtless, self-righteous, selfish worldling, dead in trespasses and sins. While on earth, the rich man was at the top of the world and Lazarus on the bottom. Now, Lazarus is above in glory and the rich man below in hell.

We should never imagine that men are blessed because they are wealthy, in good health, and appear to be happy. That which appears to be the blessing of God is often His curse. And we must never imagine that those who are poor, plagued with disease, and troubled are unbelieving and cursed. Earthly woe is often an indication of Divine favor.

“Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

Wealth and worldly honor are not marks of God's favor. Poverty and adversity are not marks of God's displeasure. Those whom God justifies and glorifies are seldom the rich and honorable of this world.

## One End

Learn this, too: death is the common end of all men. The trials of the “*beggar*” and the sumptuous living of the “*rich man,*” both ceased at the appointed hour. At God’s appointed time, both men died. Both went to the grave. As Solomon tells us, “*All go to one*

place” (Ecclesiastes 3:20). You and I are dying creatures. Few like to think about it, but it is a fact. Soon we must die (Hebrews 9:27). Death is the one thing that is common to all. Yet, most people eat, and drink, and talk, and plan as if they were going to live in this world forever. How foolish! Someone once said, “He that would live well should often think of his last day, and make it his company-keeper.” Here is an epitaph left on a tombstone long ago...

“Please view my tomb as you pass by,  
For as you are, so once was I;  
And as I am soon you shall be. —,  
So make your plans to follow me.”

“*The beggar died,*” and his pains, sorrows, and needs died. “*The rich man also died,*” and his sumptuous living, all his delight, all his wealth died! — “*Prepare to meet thy God!*”

## Blessed Prospect

This parable is also intended to assure us that for God’s elect the death of this body is a blessed prospect. In that hour all men dread, believers are specially and tenderly cared for by God. The Lord Jesus tells us that when Lazarus died, he “*was carried by angels to Abraham’s bosom.*”

I find something very precious and comforting in this expression. We know very little, if anything, about the true, inward experiences of dying people. But this much is certain: — “*Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord!*” — “*To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord!*” — “*As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.*”

Those who sleep in Jesus are in good keeping. They are not disembodied spirits, floating around in the atmosphere. While their bodies sleep in the earth, awaiting the resurrection, they are at rest among friends in Abraham’s bosom, at the feet of Christ, the Lamb upon his throne. They have no want of any kind. Best of all, Paul tells us they are “*with Christ*” (Philippians 1:23).

Truly, for the believer, “*to die is gain.*” No wonder Paul wrote as he did about things temporal and things eternal in 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:9.

## The End

Here we are allowed to see the ultimate end of all, the righteous and the unrighteous, the believing and the unbelieving. Soon, very soon, you and I will join one of these two men. We will join Lazarus in heavenly glory, or we will join the rich man in hell. This is the end of all men. May God give us wisdom and grace to lay to our hearts the things He lays before us in this portion of his Word.<sup>19</sup>

Lazarus died, and was carried up to heaven. Chosen, redeemed, and born of God, he entered into glory. But “*the rich man also died!*” What became of him?

“*In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments!*” Here, the Lord God allows us to look beyond the grave. He allows us to look into hell itself. He shows us the pains, feelings, and desires of an eternally lost, damned soul in hell, one who is forever shut up in hell under the torment of God’s infinite, holy, justice and wrath.

## Trust Christ

Are you ready to die? Are you prepared to meet your God? Oh, how I pray that God will grant you grace and cause you to flee his wrath and find refuge in Christ, that He will save you from the wrath to come, lest at last you find your place with the damned in hell!<sup>20</sup>

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19 “*It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.*” (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4)

20 Most people think nothing of saying to another, “Go to hell.” — If they had

If you would escape the fires of hell, you must give up and forsake your imaginary, pretended goodness. That which we think is goodness in ourselves is only the self-delusion of self-righteousness. That which we perceive as goodness in others is the biased perception of people who think someone must be good, because we have benefited in some way from their kindness, love, and generosity to us. The Word of God declares, "*There is none righteous...There is none that doeth good, no, not one*" (Romans 3:10-12). In fact, even David, the man after God's own heart, said to the Lord his God, "*My goodness extendeth not unto Thee*" (Psalm 16:2).

Your goodness will never take you to heaven. Your goodness is nothing but horrible sin under a pretty mask, hatred for God under a cloak of decency, and putrefying rottenness under the cover of religious perfume.

If you and I would be saved, if we would stand accepted before God and be accepted by Him in His presence forever, we must have a goodness, a righteousness that is worthy of God's approval. — A religious decision will do you no good. — Religious morality will profit you nothing. — Saying, "I believe in Jesus," will not save you. — Saying "the sinners' prayer" will only add to your condemnation.

If you would be saved, you must know the Lord God Himself. — "*This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.*" You and I cannot be saved unless we know Christ, unless we are made to be the very righteousness of God in Christ. You know that is true. Your conscience verifies these things. You may not like them. You may suppress them until you perish in hell. But you cannot deny them. This is what God demands from you and me: perfect satisfaction (atonement) (Hebrews 9:22) and perfect righteousness (Matthew 5:20).

We cannot give Him either. These things are to be had only

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any idea what they were saying, I think that even the most profane man on the face of the earth would tremble at the thought of wishing such a horrible thing upon another.

by the obedience and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the sinners' Substitute. They are ours only if we trust the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sooner or later, you will learn that these things are true. I wonder if you will learn it before it is too late. Most do not. Here in Luke 16 we read about a man who learned everything too late. He did not learn them until he was in hell.

## Lessons Learned in Hell

The passage before us has a very sobering distinction that separates it from all others. This is the only place in the entire Bible (the only place in the world) in which we learn anything at all about the thoughts and emotions of the damned in hell. Here are seven things that the rich man learned. But he learned them too late. He learned them in hell. I pray that you who read these lines will not learn them too late.

### **1. As soon as he died, this rich man discovered that death does not end all.**

*“If a man die, shall he live again?”* Indeed, we shall. We all have an immortal soul that will live on forever, after our bodies are in the grave (Mark 8:36-37). Will you spend eternity in the bliss and glory of heaven or in the torments of the damned in hell? What a meeting place hell will be for lost neighbors, for a lost daughter and her lost mother, a lost son and his lost father, a lost church member and his lost pastor

### **2. This poor soul also learned that there is a real place called “hell.”**

Hell is as real as Danville, Kentucky. The same Inspired Book that tells us about heaven and the eternal bliss of the redeemed tells us about hell and the eternal misery of the damned. The Lord Jesus tells us plainly that after death the rich man was *“in hell — tormented with fire.”* What a fearful picture He gives us. This lost soul in hell longed and begged for a drop of *“water to cool his tongue.”* He was tormented in flames. There was *“a great gulf fixed”* between him and Abraham, which could not be crossed.

J. C. Ryle wrote, “There are few more dreadful passages perhaps in the whole Bible than this. And He from whose lips it came, be it remembered, was one who delighted in mercy!”

I do not know where it is, and I cannot imagine what it is, but hell is a real place. The rich man found out too late that hell is not a myth. Hell is a place of unquenchable fire, undying worms, inescapable torment, everlasting darkness, unending hopelessness, and eternal, conscious separation from God and all that is good!

“To say Hell is a horrible place is an understatement. Most people think of Hell as the farthest point from God. It is the caves where Satan’s minions scamper about, poking feeble folk with tiny pikes and taunting them for all eternity. As bad as this seems, it does not even compare to what Hell really is. Hell is the very presence of God and His wrath without Christ as a Mediator. Hell is the ‘place’ where men face God without a Savior, without anybody to pay their debt of sin. If you thought Satan’s minions were scary, imagine being face to face with all God’s wrath with no Jesus in sight.” (Nathan Terrell)

**3. Lifting up his eyes in hell, this rich man found out what he tried his best to ignore all his life, that a holy God must and will punish sin.**

It is written, “*The soul that sinneth, it shall die!*” God is so inflexibly just and holy that when He found sin upon His own dear Son He poured out His infinite wrath upon Him. And He who punished His Son for sin will certainly punish you for sin, if your sin is not removed by His Son.

**4. The rich man found out that hell is a place of endless torment.**

He cried, “*I am tormented in this flame!*” Hell is a place of lust and desire unfulfilled, a place of mental, moral, and physical agony. When I try to imagine what the torments of the damned in hell must be, I am shocked by what I know, and quake because I realize that what I know is nothing in comparison with what

those torments actually are! Unspeakable torments! Endless torments! All I can do is cry out to poor, lost sinners, “Flee! Flee! Flee away to Christ, lest you fall into hell and the torments of the damned!”

## The Names

What dreadful names are used to describe that place in the Book of God! It is called a place where the worm dieth not (Mark 9). It is called a burning oven (Malachi 4:1). It is called a fiery-furnace (Matthew 13). It is called the bottomless pit, the unquenchable fire, fire and brimstone, hell fire, the lake of fire, devouring fire, everlasting fire, eternal fire, a stream of fire (Revelation 21), and “*the second death.*”

## The Torments

The torments of the damned are unthinkable. In hell you will have full sight and knowledge of your condition. All your senses will be fully awakened. You will have a full sight and knowledge of your wasted life, from first to last. — “*Son, remember!*” (v. 25).

The guilt of all your sin will lay heavily upon your soul. There will be no pleasure in sin for a season in hell, but only torment. Who can imagine the agony of a tormented conscience, fully awake? It will be a worm that dies not and a fire that is not quenched forever!

When God lays judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, when the hail of fire and brimstone sweeps away your refuge of lies, when the waters of God’s horrible wrath overflow your hiding place, and your covenant with death is disannulled, your covenant with death shall not stand. When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then you shall be trodden down by it (Isaiah 28:17-18). Then shall be brought to your never ceasing remembrance the fact that you are in hell, that you are damned because you despised Christ and His Gospel, because you refused

to hear His word of grace, because you rejected that one Foundation laid in Zion. What a vexation your awakened memory will be to your lost soul forever in hell (Isaiah 28:14-19; Proverbs 1:23-33).

Though he was forever confined to hell's dark prison of torment, the damned rich man saw Lazarus in the bliss of heaven's glory. Yes, the damned in hell see their friends, families, neighbors, mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, children, and those they despised on earth in the kingdom of heaven, and themselves cast out forever (Luke 13:28).

In hell your only company will be the damned — the damned angels — the damned sons of men — the damned like yourself — a vast company of men and demons who hate you as fully as you hate them, screeching and roaring so insidiously that they drive you mad, mad forever, and your madness will be madness without hope of relief!

In hell God Almighty will lay upon you all the fulness of His unmitigated wrath, without mercy. He will punish you with everlasting destruction from His presence and glory (2 Thessalonians 1:9). In this condition you must be forever (Revelation 20:6).

Perhaps the greatest torment of all is what is described in the last line of Luke 16:23. — In hell the rich man saw "*Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*" He saw Abraham and all the blessedness of covenant grace fulfilled in him. He saw Abraham and those blessings "*afar off.*" And he saw "*Lazarus in his bosom,*" possessing and enjoying all the blessings of covenant grace!

**5. In hell this poor, lost soul learned, but learned too late, that Christ is the only way of salvation.**

The rich man's riches, religion and works were of no value to him in hell. Missing Christ, he lost all! Christ alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He alone is Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. There is no salvation except by faith in Him.

**6. In hell the rich man learned, but learned too late, except a**

**man repent he will surely perish.**

In hell this man realized that without repentance there is no salvation (v. 30). In hell he saw nothing temporal is of any real value. In hell he learned that nothing really matters except Christ and faith in Him, that all else is vanity.

**7. One more thing that this rich man learned in hell, but learned too late, is this: — no one can ever be saved without hearing and believing the Gospel (vv. 28-31).**

Gospel preaching is the catalyst God uses to give life to chosen, redeemed sinners by the mighty operations of His Holy Spirit (Romans 1:16; 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25). A catalyst is an agent of action. If a chemist desires to unite two substances to create another, in many cases, a catalyst is necessary. The catalyst does not cause the union and never enters into the union of those substances. But without the presence of that specific catalyst, the union would never take place and could not continue. That is exactly what the preaching of the Gospel is in God's saving operations.

Without question, were it His pleasure to do so, God almighty could have chosen to save sinners without the use of any means or agency of any kind. Had He chosen to do so, He could have sent angels to pull us into heaven by our noses, once atonement was made for us. But that is not His pleasure.

The Lord God has chosen to regenerate and call chosen, redeemed sinners through the agency of Gospel preaching. The fact that God has so ordained it makes the preaching of the Gospel the catalyst necessary for the communication of His saving grace.

I know that many cry out against this and say, "That limits God's sovereignty. That makes salvation depend upon man." Do not be so foolish as to be found fighting against God.

We must never force the Scriptures to mean what we want them to mean. We must never bend the Word of God to our doctrinal notions and theological system. Rather, we bow to God's Word. We cannot extol and honor God if we refuse to submit our reason to his Revelation.

Carefully read the Scriptures once more. It is impossible to read the following passages in their context without concluding that regeneration and faith in Christ, gifts of God the Holy Spirit and operations of His irresistible grace are communicated to chosen sinners through the instrumentality of Gospel preaching (Romans 1:15-17; 10:13-17; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23-25). In each of those passages the Lord God plainly declares that it is His purpose and pleasure to save His elect through the preaching of the Gospel.

Perhaps you think, "What if one of God's elect is in a remote barbarian tribe in the jungles of New Guinea where no Gospel preacher has ever been?" I can see how that would create a problem, except for one thing - There are no problems with God! He knows exactly how to get His prophet to the people to whom He has purposed to show His mercy. Just ask Jonah!

We preach the Gospel with a sense of urgency, knowing that sinners cannot believe on Christ until Christ is preached to them. Yet, we preach with confidence of success, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). God's Word will not return to Him void. It will accomplish His will and prosper in the thing it is sent to do (Isaiah 55:11). Every chosen, redeemed sinner must be regenerated and called by the Holy Spirit. And that work will be accomplished through the preaching of the Gospel.

Be wise, believe the Gospel, trust Christ lest you also perish forever under the wrath of God.

# Chapter 100

## Strong Doctrine

### Luke 17:1-5

“Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith” (Luke 17:1-5).

These few verses contain the strongest doctrine set forth in Holy Scripture. Here are the deep things of God. There is nothing here but strong meat. By comparison, the things taught here make predestination, election, reprobation, limited atonement, and efficacious grace appear to be mere milk for newborn babies in the kingdom of God.

### *Certain Offenses*

“*Then said He unto the disciples.*” — The Master is addressing His disciples, those who trust Him, believe His doctrine, follow His Word, serve Him and seek to honor Him. Our Lord’s words, then, are to you and me, people who profess to be His disciples, who claim to be washed in His blood, robed in His righteousness, and saved by His grace. Now, watch what He says...

*“It is impossible but that offences will come.”* — What are the offenses He is talking about? How is it that these offenses must come? Let me answer the second question first.

Offenses must come because God has purposed them and has purposed to use them and overrule them for the salvation and everlasting good of His elect and the glory of His own great name. Multitudes are of the opinion expressed by Charles Finney in his sermon on this text. Finney said, “The doctrine of this text is that sin, under the government of God, cannot be prevented.” Of course, Finney’s assertion is utter blasphemy. To suggest that there is something, anything beyond the absolute control of God is to deny Godhood altogether. The Scriptures declare *“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain”* (Psalm 76:10). Our God asserts, *“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things”* (Isaiah 45:7).

Offenses come because God has purposed that they come for the benefit of His elect; and offenses must come because by these things the Lord God distinguishes true believers from false professors (1 Corinthians 11:19; Acts 20:30; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 1:1-2).

What are the offenses our Lord has in mind in this passage? What are these offenses that must come? The word that is translated offenses means “stumbling blocks,” “things that cause people to fall.” It is a word that we would use to refer to the trigger device that makes the trap door of a snare catch its victim.

We must read these words in their context. They immediately follow the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Our Lord is talking about offenses that deceive the soul, offenses that carry eternity bound men and women to hell. The offenses our Lord is talking about here are not mere hurt feelings or injured pride, but damning heresies like those of the Judaizers at Galatia and the will-worshippers at Colosse. And the offenses in this passage certainly include behavior that leads others to ruin. The Scriptures make it clear that the offenses of one generation are visited upon succeeding generations in Divine judgment (Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:8; Deuteronomy 5:9).

The whole world is a stumbling-block. There is not one thing in it which is not calculated to turn the heart from God. The dress, the vanities and vulgarities in the street, the political and educational systems, the flatteries of men, the fame and riches the world offers, and its religion, all tend to elevate the flesh, as in the case of the rich man in the parable.

## Christ's Warning

*“But woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.”* — Our Lord Jesus here refers to an ancient form of capital punishment reserved for only the most reprehensible criminals. He is saying that it would be better for a man to be guilty of any horrid crime, for which men are justly executed, than to be guilty of causing another to perish in hell.

Who are *“these little ones?”* Again, the answer must be determined by the context. The little ones of whom our Lord is speaking here are those poor, despised publicans and sinners, who were sitting before Him. Our Savior has been talking to the Scribes and Pharisees, who despised these little ones and would by their religion shut them out of heaven. Now, as He addresses His disciples, He waves His hand over the sinners sitting before Him and says, *“Woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.”*

When do men cause *“offenses”* to come? Certainly this is done any time they persecute believers, or endeavor to deter others from serving Christ. And offenses come by heretical doctrine, which subverts the souls of men. But offenses are not limited to such actions. We lay snares by which Satan traps the souls of many whenever we bring reproach upon the Gospel by our behavior.

That was the result of David's sin when he took Bathsheba and had Uriah killed (2 Samuel 12:14). *“Howbeit, because by this*

*deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.*” That was the crime Paul laid against the Jews, when he said, *“the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you”* (Romans 2:24). Let us take care that we give no offense to eternity bound sinners, that we lay no snare before them, that we destroy none (1 Corinthians 10:31-32).

## Forgiveness

*“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.”* — Here our Lord moves on to another of the deep things of God. He warns us to carefully avoid giving offense to eternity bound men and women in verses 1 and 2. In verses 3 and 4 He tells us (His disciples, you and me, all who believe the Gospel) not to take offense at the actions of our brothers and sisters in the family of God.

*“Take heed to yourselves.”* — It is ever our proud tendency to take heed to others, to guard others, and to correct others. The Scriptures constantly teach us to take heed to, to guard, to discipline, and to correct ourselves.

*“If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him.”* — If your brother or sister in Christ says, or does something by which he wrongs you, graciously, kindly speak to him about it, and no one else, make him aware of it, and no one else, always presuming that there was no intention on his part to hurt, injure, or offend you.

The word rebuke does not mean, “ream him out,” but show him what he has done. He may be shocked to discover it. In fact, the word carries with it the idea of showing honor. Yes, when I have been hurt, injured, or offended by my brother, it is my responsibility to show him honor.

*“And if he repent, forgive him.”* — As soon as he says, “I’m sorry. “I’m so sorry. I would not intentionally hurt you for the world,” forgive him. Drop all resentment and anger, and show him nothing but sweetness of temper, the kindness of love, and

the respect of one who has done no wrong; and do it immediately!

Perhaps you think, “Lord, that’s tough.” Oh, no. That’s not tough. The next line is tough on our proud flesh!

*“And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.”* — Our brothers and sisters are just exactly like us. Like us, they do the same, dumb things over and over again (Proverbs 24:16).

Yet, nothing is more constantly urged in the New Testament than the practice of forgiveness. Why? Because there is nothing to which we are more naturally disinclined. Our flesh wants vengeance. Grace teaches forgiveness. Pride wants to punish. Mercy teaches forgiveness. Self-righteousness demands retribution. Love demands forgiveness. If I cannot forgive my brother the few trifling offences he may have committed against me, I know nothing experimentally of that free and full forgiveness that sinners have by the grace of God in Christ (Matthew 6:9-15; 18:35).

Our Lord warns, *“Take heed to yourselves,”* because nothing is so harmful to your soul, nothing makes you so miserable and useless as a proud, hard, unforgiving heart. Nothing makes a person more utterly wretched on the inside as nursing hurt feelings and feeding malice with the manure of resentment.

Our Lord’s word to us here is, *“Do yourself no harm.”* The least degree of malice, hatred, or revenge is altogether contrary to the Gospel we believe and totally inconsistent with the character of our blessed Lord.

But He knows what is in us. He remembers that we are dust, ever encumbered by our flesh. He knows how very prone we are to offend one another, how quick we are to hurt and injure each other, how repeatedly we say and do things to quench the Spirit, disrupt the peace, and injure the fellowship of His body.

Therefore, He tenderly teaches us how to correct the evil. When your brother does something against you, do not resent him for it, but pity him, pray for him. Call his name before your

heavenly Father, his heavenly Father. If he aggravates his offence by frequent repetition, still, do not resent him, but pity him, pray for him, and do whatever you can to help him (Galatians 6:1-3). As often as he offends, that often forgive. If he repents, forgive him. If he does not repent, let that be his problem. Forgive him any way. William Mason wrote...

“We must not, at our peril, entertain anger, or let the sun go down on our wrath, but in our hearts freely and fully forgive an offending brother. But what if he remains stubborn and persists in a spirit of bitterness? Even then we are to forgive him in our hearts, and be desirous of embracing him in love.”

As God's thoughts of love are toward us before we turn to Him, so our thoughts of love should be to our offending brethren before they turn to us. Does the Son of God require us to forgive every repeated offence, even until seventy times seven, 490 times a day? I find something wonderfully glorious in that. — Surely He will magnify His love and display His mercy in pardoning the innumerable offences of all who turn to Him!

## Prayer for Faith

Our Lord has been addressing His disciples in general. When the apostles, the preachers among them, heard His strong doctrine, this was their response: — *“And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.”*

They understood that this was strong doctrine, far too strong for flesh to embrace. Flesh can grasp eternal justification, distinguishing grace, sovereign predestination, reprobation, and limited atonement. By comparison, those things are a piece of cake. Flesh can understand and promote the most rigidly orthodox dogma. Flesh loves and revels in church doctrine and the mysteries of prophecy.

But forgives requires a continual supply of grace, grace experienced deep in our souls, by which the Lord God continually increases our faith. And the more our faith in Christ

increases, the more fully we learn that our only hope before God is free, constant, absolute forgiveness by the blood of the cross, flowing to our souls from the ever-springing fountain of His everlasting love, the more ready and able we will be to forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32-5:2).

# Chapter 101

## “Lord, Increase our faith.”

Luke 17:5-10

“And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:5-10).

### Our Faith

The first thing we are confronted with in our text is our faith, not the greatness of it, but the smallness of it, not the strength of it, but the weakness of it, not the victory of it, but the failure of it. These days there is far too much emphasis placed upon our faith. Thank God, Christ, the Object of our faith is great; but our faith in Christ isn't much to brag about. Is it? We all (all who truly trust Christ alone as Savior and Lord) have great need to cry with the apostles, “*Lord, Increase our faith.*” The fact is we all lack much in the matter of faith.

We are not told why the apostles made this request; but the reason is at least hinted at in the context. Remember, this request came after these men had attentively heard our Master give out the words of instruction contained in the last two chapters and in the first verses of chapter 17. I can imagine how their hearts must have sunk within them, as they heard these weighty lessons, one after another, fall from the Master's lips. Perhaps they thought, "Who is sufficient for these things? Who can receive such high doctrines? Who can follow such lofty standards?" One thing is clear and plain. The request they made was deeply important — "*Increase our faith.*"

Faith in Christ is the root of the matter (Hebrews 11:6). "*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*" Until this question is settled, all others are meaningless. "*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*" That is the essential thing (John 3:36; 1 John 5:1, 10-12). Faith is the hand by which the soul lays hold on Christ, and is experimentally united to him, and saved by him. Faith in Christ is the secret of all spiritual comfort, assurance, and peace. According to a man's faith will be his peace, his hope, his strength, his courage, his decisiveness, and his victory over the world.

Certainly, there are varying degrees of faith. Some have greater, stronger faith, and in others the exercise of faith is less and weaker. And it varies in us day by day, hour by hour, and moment by moment. There is "little" faith and "great" faith. There is "weak" faith and "strong" faith. Both are spoken of in the Scriptures. Both are seen in the experience of God's saints.

I ask again, "*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*" It is written, "*All men have not faith*" (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Saving faith is not merely being able to recite a creed, or give assent to facts. Religion is not faith. Doctrinal orthodoxy is not faith. Baptism is not faith. Church membership is not faith. A religious experience is not faith. There are multitudes in hell who had all these things; but they did not trust Christ.

Faith is the gift of God. It is wrought in us by the omnipotent operations of His grace (Ephesians 1:19-20; 2:8; Colossians 2:12). This faith is the result of what the old preachers used to

call Holy Spirit conviction (John 16:7-11). Faith in Christ is essential to salvation. You must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, or you must forever perish. Yet, faith is not our Savior. Faith brings righteousness to us; but faith is not our righteousness. An imperfect faith cannot establish perfect righteousness. John Gill wrote...

“Faith is imperfect in the best of saints; our Lord frequently called His own disciples, men of little faith; and so conscious were they themselves of the imperfection of it, that they prayed to Him, saying (Luke 17:5), Lord increase our faith. There are some deficiencies, something lacking, in the faith of the best of God’s people. Every one has reason to say, more or less, as the poor man in the gospel did (Mark 9:24), *“Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief.”* And for this reason faith cannot be our justifying righteousness, for that ought to be perfect. Besides, were it perfect, it is but a part of the law. It is indeed one of the weightier matters of the law, as in (Matthew 23:23), but then it is not the whole of the law. Now the scripture says (Galatians 3:10), *“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”* And God whose judgment is according to truth, cannot reckon that a perfect conformity to the law, which is only a partial one.”

## Mustard Seed Faith

When the apostles prayed, *“Lord, Increase our faith,”* rather than assuring them that their faith was just fine, He seems to deliberately aggravate their sense of utter weakness and insufficiency in the matter of faith. — *“And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you”* (v. 6).

Without question, this was a proverbial statement. It is not to be taken literally. Our Lord is using this proverbial statement to

teach us a very, very important lesson. — The reason we see so little of the glory of God, the reason we accomplish so little for the glory of God, the reason we constantly meet with things that appear to be insurmountable objects, the reason we are tossed about with so many fears, the reason we enjoy so little of our God is that we have such small, little, insignificant faith in our great God and Savior, that it cannot even be compared to a grain of mustard seed faith (Mark 9:23; John 11:40).

*“Lord, Increase our faith!”* Perhaps nothing about us is more shameful than our lack of faith in such a great God and Savior. Nothing about me needs more to be bathed in His precious blood, covered with His spotless righteousness, and forgiven by His constant grace than my faith in Him! *“Lord, Increase our faith!”*

## Faith and Forgiveness

Clearly, there is a connection between the disciples’ prayer in verse 5 and the Savior’s instruction about forgiveness in verses 3 and 4. Read the three verses together.

“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.”

The Lord’s disciples were astonished at the infinite goodness the Lord Jesus had just expressed about the matter of forgiveness. Knowing that such faith is His gift, they begged His mercy to increase their faith. Longing to exercise the great grace of forgiveness to one another and knowing that they could never do so without His grace (John 15:5), they begged the Lord Jesus to increase their faith. Blessed are they who seek such grace, that they may be gracious (Colossians 3:12, 13).

## Unprofitable Servants

Not only is our faith in Christ so utterly weak that it can never merit anything from God, our best service to Him is but the service and sacrifice of unprofitable servants (vv. 7-10).

“But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

What a heavy blow our Lord gives to self-righteousness. We are all naturally proud and self-righteous. We think far more highly of ourselves, our deserts, and our character, than we ought.

Self-righteousness is a subtle disease that manifests itself in a thousand ways. We see it easily and quickly in others; but seldom see it in ourselves. Great pride often wears the cloak of humility. There is not a heart upon earth that does not contain a piece of the Pharisee’s character.

Yet, we must give up every claim of righteousness and merit before God, or we cannot be saved. If you would be saved, you must confess that there is no good thing in you, and that you have no merit, no goodness, and no worthiness of your own before God. You must renounce your own righteousness and trust the righteousness of another, even the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Once pardoned and forgiven, we must travel the daily journey of life under a deep conviction that we are but “*unprofitable servants*.” At our best, we only do our duty, and have nothing to boast of. And even when we do our duty, it is not by our own power and might that we do it, but by the strength which is given

to us from God our Savior. Claim upon God we have none. Right to expect anything from God we have none. Worthiness to deserve anything from God we have none. All that we have we have received. All that we are we owe to God's sovereign, distinguishing grace.

What is the root and cause of self-righteousness? How is it that such poor, weak, erring creatures as we are can ever dream of deserving anything at God's hands? It all arises from ignorance. The eyes of our understandings are naturally blinded. We see neither ourselves, nor our lives, nor God, nor the law of God as we ought. Once the light of grace shines into a sinner's heart the reign of self-righteousness is over. The pride remains and often raises its ugly head; but the reign of pride is broken when Christ comes to rule. The true believer does not trust himself, but Christ alone.

## Lessons

The lessons set before us here are crystal clear.

1. It is ever our responsibility to do our Master's will, to obey his Word.
2. When we have done all that He requires (even if that were possible and we did it), we should expect no reward for doing that which is our duty to do.
3. We are the Lord's, entirely His, lock, stock and barrel. All our time, strength, abilities, and possessions are His. We are obliged to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.
4. When we have done all that He has commanded us, when our day of service in this world is finished, let us acknowledge, "*We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*" The words "*unprofitable servants*" mean "servants who have benefited their master nothing," "servants of no value," or "worthless servants of no benefit."

## A Great Contrast

That is exactly how all God's people look upon themselves. We are "*unprofitable servants*" — "servants who have benefited our Master nothing," "servants of no value," "worthless servants of no benefit." But our Master's sees things another way. His view of us is a little different. Look at the contrast (Matthew 25:21, 34-40; 1 Peter 2:5). What a great and blessed revelation of the Gospel this is: — All who are born of God, all who trust the Lord Jesus are "*accepted in the Beloved,*" and our works too!

# Chapter 102

## Cleansed, but Not Healed

### Luke 17:11-19

“And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up [their] voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw [them], he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on [his] face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where [are] the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole” (Luke 17:11-19).

Have you just been cleansed, or have you been healed? Have you merely been changed, or have you been made whole?

During the days of our Lord’s earthly ministry, there were many who enjoyed the outward, temporal benefits of His works who never knew Him. Many who touched His body never touched Him. Many who drank the wine at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee never tasted the wine of His grace. Many ate the loaves and fishes who never tasted the Bread of Life. And there were multitudes who knew the power of His word to heal their bodies who never knew the power of His grace in the healing of

their souls. Luke 17:11-19 demonstrates these things very clearly.

How many there are like those nine lepers who want no more from Christ than power to correct their woes. Because that is all they seek, that is all they get. I have known many who in times of great danger, or great difficulty, or because they have brought upon themselves great misery, pray, profess faith in Christ, join the church, and become very religious (at least for a while). Their lives have been radically reformed. They have made great changes. Their troubles were healed. And once they got what they wanted, like the nine lepers in this passage, they “*are not found.*” They were cleansed, but only outwardly. They were cleansed, but not healed. There is a difference.

Then there are others like the one leper who “*when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at Christ’s feet, giving him thanks.*” There are many, many lessons for our souls in this passage. May God the Holy Spirit be our Teacher and seal to our hearts the things revealed in these ten lepers.

## Verse 11

“*And it came to pass, as He went to Jerusalem, that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.*” — The Lord Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. He was going there for the blessed purpose of laying down His life in the room and stead of His sinful people, to finish the work for which He had come into this world of sin and woe. There He would lay down His life for His sheep. There He would pour out His life’s blood unto death, bearing our sin in His own body on the cursed tree. There, He would suffer all the horrid wrath of God as our Substitute, all the unmitigated fury of divine justice to the full satisfaction of justice, until at last He would cry, “*It is finished!*” He was going to Jerusalem to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

As He made His way to the place of sacrifice, “*He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.*” Much speculation has been made about this; but the simple fact is that the nearest way

to get from Galilee to Jerusalem was by going through Samaria. And our ever faithful Savior had an appointment at Jerusalem that He must now keep, an appointment with God's offended justice, an appointment of grace and redemption for us, and an appointment of death for Him. His time had now come. His hour was now at hand. And the Lord Jesus would not turn back (Isaiah 50:5-7). — *“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved us to the end!”*

## Verse 12

*“And as He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off.”* — We are told in verse 16 that one of these lepers was a Samaritan. I find that interesting. The Samaritans and Jews despised one another. Normally, they would never be seen in company with one another. But affliction and misery, poverty and need often make men friends, who in times of health and prosperity despise one another because of stupid prejudice. If misery will cause lost men to put aside such proud strife and division, how shameful it is when those who profess to know the grace of God cannot put away social, racial, and class distinctions!

On the outskirts of one of the villages, ten leprous men were gathered to meet the Son of God, united in a community of deadly misery. They were far off, because they dare not approach, since their approach was pollution; and they were obliged to warn away all who would come near them by the shameful, heart-rending cry, “Unclean! Unclean!”

No doubt these ten lepers had heard that the Lord Jesus was passing their way. Why else would they have come to meet Him? They had heard His fame, how that He had healed other lepers. So they came to the Son of God desiring that He might heal them.

These men were lepers. There was something in that living death of leprosy, recalling as it did the most frightful images of suffering and degradation, corrupting as it did the very fountains of the life blood of man, distorting his appearance, making his touch loathsome, slowly incrusting and infecting him with a

plague far more horrible than death itself, which always seems to have aroused our Lord's heart with keen and instantaneous compassion.

## Leprosy

I doubt that anyone who has never seen a man in the condition of these men can imagine the scene before our Lord. Here are ten men who are lepers. Their voices are hoarse and raspy. They are covered with sores and scabs. Their faces like chunks of burned coal are bloated, but hard, cracked, and scabbed. Their flesh is rotting on their bodies. Their eyes are bloodshot and burning, their noses sunken because of decaying cartilage, their tongues black, swollen, and ulcerated. They are dying a miserable death together!

## Our Leprosy

Transfer the picture in your mind to another. You are looking now into a mirror. Oh, what miserable, deplorable objects we are. You see, you and I are all lepers by nature. Leprosy stands before us in Holy Scripture as a vivid picture of sin. Leprosy was, according to Old Testament law, a disease that made a person unclean. He was pronounced unclean by the priest (the law), put out of the camp of Israel, and isolated from society. Everything the leper touched was defiled and unclean. Leprosy, like sin, is a spreading disease, corrupting the whole life of a man, until he is destroyed by it altogether. The leprosy of sin corrupts the entire human race. It is spread through all our members. It has shut us outside the camp and made us far off from God (Ephesians 2:11-12). Leprosy, like sin, is an incurable disease, incurable by any earthly, human means.

Lepers were never sent to a doctor. They were sent to a priest. But all the priest could do was look at the leper's condition, declare him unclean, and shut him out of the camp. He could do nothing for him (Leviticus 13:2-3; 14:2-3). The whole Levitical law concerning lepers and leprosy is intended to show us the

nature and use of the law. It identifies our leprosy, concludes that we are lepers, and declares that we are unclean, but does nothing to change or help our condition. Nothing but the precious, sin-atoning blood of Christ, nothing but the stripes inflicted upon Him by the whip of God's holy law and justice can heal us of our disease and cleanse us of the plague of our hearts.

## Cleansing

As leprosy portrays our sin, the cleansing of a leper under the law (Leviticus 13 and 14) portrayed the healing of our souls by Christ. In order for the leper to be ceremonially clean, two birds were to be taken clean and alive (Leviticus 14:5-6, 50-52). Both were typical of Christ.

One of the birds was killed in an earthen vessel over running water, showing that Christ must be killed, his blood must be shed for the cleansing of leprous sinners. The earthen vessel denoted his human nature, his flesh, in which he was put to death. The running water signified the purifying nature of his blood, and the continued virtue of it to cleanse from all sin.

The living bird, along with the cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop was dipped in the blood of the slain bird. Then, the priest let the living bird go, typifying the resurrection of Christ and our resurrection with Him, declaring redemption accomplished, acceptance assured, and sin put away.

## Verse 13

Ten men who were lepers met the Lord Jesus on his way to Calvary. — *“And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”* These men knew full well that no mere man had ever healed another of leprosy. But they had heard that this Man had. So they called upon Him, the Man who stood before them in human flesh as God, asking Him to have mercy upon them. Our blessed Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is Jehovah-rophe, the Lord who heals us.

## Verse 14

*“And when He saw them, He said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.”* — When these lepers begged Him to show them mercy, the Lord Jesus said, *“Go show yourselves unto the priests.”* In the Old Testament law those who thought they might be lepers were required to go show themselves to the priests, so that the priests (The Levites — The Law) could confirm that they were indeed lepers (Leviticus 13:2-3). Obviously, these men had already been through that procedure. They were already declared to be and identified as lepers.

Why, then, did the Lord Jesus command them to go show themselves to the priests again. You will find the answer in Leviticus 14:2-3. There the leper who was clean was required to go show himself to the priest (The Levite — The Law), not to be made clean, but to be pronounced clean. In other words, the Lord Jesus said, “You are clean,” and sent them on their way to be ceremonially pronounced clean. These men believed His word. They headed straight to the priests to be pronounced clean.

*“And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.”* — As they started to the priests, they looked upon themselves and realized that they were clean. Their leprosy was gone. They had been healed by the mere sovereign will of the sovereign Savior!

## Verses 15-18

*“And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: And he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.”*

These verses are full of instruction. Why did the other nine go on

to the priests? And why did this one Samaritan stranger return to the Lord Jesus, glorifying God with a loud voice, as he fell down on his face at the Savior's feet? The answer should be obvious.

The other nine called the Lord Jesus by His name, Jehovah-Jesus, God our Savior, and acknowledged Him as Master, and were cleansed of their leprosy in their bodies; but this man, being both cleansed of his physical leprosy and healed of the leprosy that plagued his heart, came back to worship the Lord Jesus as God his Savior. He was not only cleansed of his leprosy, he was made whole.

### Verse 19

*“And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.”* — When the nine were cured of the ailment of their bodies, they had obtained all that they wanted. They needed and wanted nothing else. But this Samaritan stranger had experienced something else. He was healed of his leprosy, and grace was poured into his soul. The nine were content to go on just as they had before, living under the yoke of bondage and ceremonialism. But this man was forever done with Jewish priests, religious ceremonies, legal sacrifices, and carnal ordinances. He fled away to the Son of God, the Author and Finisher of his salvation.

Countless multitudes, like those nine lepers, being healed only outwardly in their bodies, by a religious encounter of one kind or another, never know or worship the Son of God. But poor, wretched sinners, knowing the leprosy of their souls, as soon as they are made whole by the Lord Jesus, fall at His feet, glorifying God with thankful hearts. They go no more to the law of carnal commandments, but ever come to the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, made our Priest forever after the power of an endless life (Hebrews 7:16).

To all who thus believe on the Son of God, He declares, *“Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.”* Did the Lord Jesus actually say that? Surely not! Oh, but He did, didn't He? He did not just say it here; he said it many times. In Matthew 9:22 He said to the woman with an issue of blood who touched Him,

*“Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole.”* In Mark 10:52 He told Bartimaeus, whom He had just healed of his blindness, *“Thy faith hath made thee whole.”* In Luke 7:50 our Savior said to the woman who was a sinner, who worshipped Him as her Savior, *“Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”* In Luke 18:42 the Master gave sight to another blind man and said, *“Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.”*

I know many who would cringe if they heard a preacher say that to any sinner. They are scared to death that the plain statements of Holy Scripture will utterly destroy their wonderful system of doctrine. Any system of doctrine that cannot bear the plain statements of Holy Scripture is a corrupt system and needs destroying.

Such statements as this, *“Thy faith hath made thee whole,”* must never be explained away, but delightfully embraced. No, faith is not our Savior! We are saved altogether by the work of God’s omnipotent grace, without our aid. But there is no salvation without faith in Christ!

Yes, Christ gives us faith. It is the gift and operation of God the Holy Spirit. But having wrought faith in us and given it to us, it is our faith. And we receive all the bounteous blessings of God’s rich, free grace by faith in Christ.

The Lord God promises eternal salvation to faith in His dear Son, declaring that all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ have everlasting life. — *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”* And every sinner who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ glorifies God, falling at the feet of His all-glorious Savior, worshipping Him alone as his Savior, with a heart of never dying, deeply felt gratitude, crying, *“By the grace of God I am what I am! — Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!”*

I ask you again: — Have you just been cleansed, or have you been healed? Have you merely been changed, or have you been made whole? May the Lord Jesus now make you whole for His own dear name’s sake.

# Chapter 103

## The Kingdom of God

### Luke 17:20-25

“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see [it]. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after [them], nor follow [them]. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one [part] under heaven, shineth unto the other [part] under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation” (Luke 17:20-25).

That is what the Son of God Himself has to say about the kingdom of God. Almost everything you hear preachers say or read from the writings of men about the kingdom of God is totally false. All the popular books about the coming of the Kingdom of God and the end of the world promote nothing but carnal notions about future things. Almost everything to be found in the notes of reference Bibles and study Bibles about prophetic things is false. Obviously, I have not read them all; but I have read a few, and I have not yet read even one that sets forth the teaching of Holy Scripture about the kingdom of God. I urge you to ignore such religious tomfoolery.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> If a man is getting rich on his message, you can be sure it is *his message*,

And if what I have to say to you in this study is not verified by the Word of God, count what I say as nothing more than religious tomfoolery. I will go further than that. — If what I have to say to you in this message is not exactly what God says in His Word about His Kingdom, ignore me and count what I say as nothing more than religious tomfoolery.

Let's look at these six verses line by line, praying that God the Holy Spirit will be our Teacher.

### A Derisive Demand

First, we read that our Lord Jesus was “*demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come*” (v. 20). Everything the Pharisees asked our Lord was asked with an evil motive. They never asked anything that they might learn, but only that they might accuse the Lord Jesus of some evil by twisting His words, or deride our Savior's doctrine.

But here, they went even further; they “*demanded*” Him! What arrogance! What presumption! What hellishness of heart is exposed when sinful men dare to demand anything from the God of Glory! Yet, those who made this demand pretended to be the only true worshippers of God!

The word translated “*demanded*” means “accosted” or “interrogated.” All the Jews, including the Pharisees, were looking for the coming of the Kingdom of God. They were looking for the promised Messiah to come and establish His Kingdom on earth, making them the rulers over all the world.

But this demand has the tone of derision in it. It is as if they said, “You tell us you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the King. If that is true, where is the kingdom? Do you really expect anyone to believe that such a poor, common man, a man known to keep company with sinners is the Christ of God? How long do you expect us to wait for this kingdom of yours to appear?”

## The Master's Answer

Our Lord Jesus seized the occasion given Him by their derision to teach his own disciples some blessed Gospel truths.

First, he says, "*The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation*" (v. 20). I can almost picture the puzzled look of utter ignorance upon the faces of those ignorant Pharisees. Our Lord answered these fools according to their folly, only to make them more ignorant, only to give them greater confusion.

Yet, He was at the same time teaching His own disciples who were in the crowd that day, and teaching His disciples of all future days. How Peter, James, and John must have perked up their ears. Mary Magdalene, I am sure, came to a dead silence. "*The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation.*" What does that mean? It means that the Kingdom of God is not at all like any earthly kingdom.

Its coming cannot be observed by the eye, by observing signs, marking dates, measuring time, or checking off fulfilled prophecy. Its presence cannot be observed by carnal means, because it is not carnal, but spiritual. Those who expect to observe anything of this kind are sure to be disappointed. They wait and watch in vain for a carnal, material kingdom that will never come, just as the Pharisees did. The Lord Jesus says, "*The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation.*" These three things, at least, are meant by His words.

1. The kingdom of God does not come with pomp and pageantry. It does not come with an outward show of any kind. In fact, the translation given in the margin of your Bible is, "The Kingdom of God cometh not with outward show."

2. The kingdom of God does not come in such a way that men can observe it.

God's Kingdom is a kingdom no one can see, except he be born again. It is a kingdom none can enter, but by the new birth (John 3:3, 5). No one can discern anything at all about this Kingdom, except those who are taught of God and have the mind of Christ (John 3:1-8; 1 Corinthians 2:12-16).

3. Our Lord's words in verse 20 also mean, perhaps primarily means that the Kingdom of God does not come by the observation of religious laws, ceremonies, traditions, and ordinances.

The kingdom of God does not come by observing holy days and doing holy things. You do not get into the Kingdom of God by receiving imaginary sacraments and doing imaginary good works. The kingdom of God is not a matter of religious dos and taboos (Romans 14:17; Colossians 2:20-23). The fact is if you and I see something that so greatly impresses our eyes, our natural senses, and/or our feelings that we are by what we see inclined to think, "Surely, the Kingdom of God is here," we are wrong, dead wrong. Look at the first line of verse 21 and see if that is not precisely what the Master tells us.

## A Warning

*"Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there"* (v. 21). — What does that mean? Really, it is just an amplification of what our Lord has just declared, *"The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation."* Many in those days, in the days immediately following our Lord's earthly ministry, and at various times throughout the past 2000 years have said that this or the other false prophet is the Christ. Many have said the Kingdom of God will appear here or there, at this or that time.

Our Lord warns us to ignore such claims, no matter who makes them, no matter how convincing their arguments are, and no matter how many follow them.

But there is more to the warning than that. We live in a day of mega-churches, super-churches, and crystal cathedrals. Every year at Christmas and Easter every major television network broadcasts the idolatrous splendor of Rome and his *unholiness* the pope. Televangelists bedazzle millions with their religious crusades, great works, and miracles. And we are all prone to marvel at the great whore Babylon, and the riches, crowds, and magnificence of free-will, works religion. We tend to think, "Surely, this must be God's work and God's Kingdom. All these

people cannot be wrong.” That is exactly what the Apostle John did when he saw it (Revelation 17:4-8). But such marveling is but marveling at a gorgeously arrayed harlot, whose sole mission is the everlasting destruction of immortal souls, a harlot who deserves to be and shall be destroyed. Only those whose names are not written in the Book of Life are intoxicated by the wine of her fornications.

## Within You

Now, watch the Lord’s next words in the latter part of verse 21. — *“Behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”* The word *“within”* might be translated, as it is in the margin of your Bible, *“among.”* In that case our Lord’s words here mean that the Kingdom of God is already here, in your midst. He and His disciples were among them. That is certainly true, the Kingdom of God is already in the earth. God’s Church is His Kingdom. Yet, the word used by our translators conveys our Lord’s doctrine accurately. — *“Behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”*

It is a spiritual kingdom not a carnal kingdom, a heavenly kingdom not an earthly kingdom, an inward kingdom not an outward kingdom. It lies not in outward things, *“but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”* (Romans 14:17). The Kingdom of God is established in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners by the omnipotent grace of King Jesus. It is established by the binding and dispossession of Satan, the strong man armed, and the overthrow of the old man, sin, with its deceitful lusts, from the throne. The Kingdom of God has its seat in the inward parts, the inner man. It does not lie in words, in an outward profession of religion. It is oil in the vessel of the heart, and is distinct from the lamp of a visible profession. It does not lie in external works and duties; but it is an inward principle of godliness in the soul, or spirit of man, produced there by the Spirit of God. The kingdom of God is a kingdom governed by grace. In this kingdom grace reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life by Jesus Christ the King. Christ Jesus, as the King of saints, dwells and reigns in His people.

## Great Trouble

In verses 22 and 23 our Lord turns to His disciples. He warns us here of a time of great trouble. The time He is talking about is not any specific day, but any day in which the words of these two verses are applicable.

*“And He said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it”* (v. 22). — The “*days*” to which our Lord refers are the whole Gospel age, the days of God’s church in this world, from the time of our Savior’s death to the time of His second coming.

How often those disciples who heard these words must have echoed them! How often they must have pined for Christ’s physical presence with them again! How often they must have thought to themselves, “How I wish I had paid more attention! How I wish I had not neglected the opportunities I had! What sweet hours and days of blessed communion and instruction they were!”

But, I am confident that our Lord’s words here were not spoken for those disciples alone. They were spoken for us. They are applicable to us. “*The days of the Son of Man*” are those times and seasons when the Son of Man meets with, instructs, comforts, and blesses His people, by making Himself known to us, by taking the things of God and showing them to us. They are our days of public worship in the house of God under the ministry of the Gospel. It is here where the Lord Jesus promises that He will meet with His people (Matthew 18:20).

When God’s saints are deprived of these days, by reason of persecution, or sickness, or providence, then they learn to value them highly. Once they are gone, they are treasured. Let us, as John Gil admonished, “prize, make use of, and improve such days and opportunities, whilst we have them. We know not how soon our teachers may be removed into corners, when we shall wish in vain for them; and seasons of hearing them, as is here suggested. Sad it is to know the worth of Gospel opportunities, by the want of them!”

Yet, even when such times come, even when we are placed in circumstances in which we have no place of worship, no one to preach the Gospel to us, no sweet times of fellowship in God's house with Zion's pilgrims, should such ever come to pass, we must not chase after the bubbles of religious excitement. We must not follow those who follow false christs (v. 23).

## His Day

In verse 24 our Savior speaks of His day and of His coming in His day without warning, without signs, suddenly and speedily, like a bolt of lightning. — *“For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.”*

Certainly, this is applicable to our Lord's glorious, second advent. But the opening word of the verse, “*for*”, seems to me to give it a direct connection to our Lord's words in verse 22, “*ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man*”, and our Lord's warning not to follow false christs in verses 22 and 23. You see, the days of the Son of man are those days in which our Savior comes to us in mercy, love, and grace, and makes Himself known to us. Whatever that day is, it is His day, the day of the Lord, and it always comes unexpectedly, like a bolt of lightning (Isaiah 12:1-6). Oh, what a day that day is! When Christ comes to save His own by power of His grace, when He comes to revive His languishing ones, when He comes to call His ransomed at their appointed hour of death, when He comes in His glorious second advent, — whenever Christ comes to His own, it is His day; and it is glorious!

## The “Must”

But, before our Savior can come to any sinner in saving mercy, before He could ascend to His throne in Glory as our Mediator, before He could come again without sin unto salvation, something else must happen. — He must suffer and die as our sin-atoning Substitute, by the hands of wicked men, according to

the purpose of God, for the satisfaction of Divine justice, that the Lord our God might be “*a just God and a Savior*” (v. 25; Isaiah 45:20; Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; 9:12; Luke 9:22; 22:7; 24:7, 44; John 3:14; 12:32).

Before He could come to us in grace, with the blessings of redemption, grace, and salvation, the Lord Jesus had to suffer and die as our Substitute, put away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself, rise from the dead, and ascend to His throne as the King of Glory, as our Savior King. Thank God, He did!

# Chapter 104

## The Distinguishing Grace of God

Luke 17:20-37

“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see [it]. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after [them], nor follow [them]. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one [part] under heaven, shineth unto the other [part] under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed [them] all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’s wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and

whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two [men] in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two [women] shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two [men] shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body [is], thither will the eagles be gathered together” (Luke 17:20-37).

The Lord Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to lay down his life for us, to die as our Substitute, “*the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.*” This passage in Luke (vv. 20-37) is thought by many to be an abbreviated version of our Lord’s Olivet Discourse given in Matthew’s Gospel (Matthew 24 and 25), because there are portions used in it that are exactly the same. But that is a mistake. Though some of the words used by the Master are the same, the occasion is different. In Matthew 24 our Lord Jesus had already come to Jerusalem. Here He is on His way to Jerusalem, passing through the regions of Samaria and Galilee (v. 11). In Matthew 24 and 25 our Lord is answering questions raised by His disciples concerning the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem and the time of His coming. Here, His message begins as a response to the Pharisees who accosted him as to “*when the kingdom of God should come*” (v. 20).

Our Savior answered these Pharisees by telling them that their notions concerning the kingdom of God were carnal and altogether wrong. He told them that the kingdom of God does not come with observation. These three things, at least, are meant by His words:

1. The kingdom of God does not come with pomp and pageantry. — It does not come with an outward show of any kind. In fact, the translation given in the margin of your Bible is, “The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show.”
2. The kingdom of God does not come in such a way that men can observe it. — God’s kingdom is a kingdom no one can see, except those who are born again. It is a kingdom none can enter, but by the new birth (John 3:3, 5).

3. Our Lord's words in verse 20 also mean, perhaps primarily mean that the kingdom of God does not come by the observation of religious laws, ceremonies, traditions, and ordinances. — The kingdom of God does not come by observing holy days and doing holy things: — Baptism — Sacraments — Good Works, etc. The kingdom of God is not a matter of religious dos and taboos (Romans 14:17; Colossians 2:20-23).

Any time we see something that so greatly impresses our eyes, our natural senses, and/or our feelings that we are by what we see inclined to think, "Surely, the kingdom of God is here," we are wrong, dead wrong. That is precisely what the Master tells us in verse 21.

### A Warning

*"Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there!"* (v. 21). — That is just an amplification of what our Lord has just declared: *"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation."* Many in those days, in the days immediately following our Lord's earthly ministry, and at various times throughout the past 2000 years have said that this or the other false prophet is the Christ. Many have said the kingdom of God will appear here or there, at this or that time. Our Lord warns us to ignore such claims, no matter who makes them, no matter how convincing their arguments are, and no matter how many people follow them.

### Within You

*"Behold, the kingdom of God is within you."* — It is a spiritual kingdom not a carnal kingdom, a heavenly kingdom not an earthly kingdom, an inward kingdom not an outward kingdom. It lies not in outward things, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17). The kingdom of God is established in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners when Christ the King of Glory enters into the heart and establishes His dominion in them by His omnipotent grace.

## Great Trouble

In verses 22-25 our Lord turns to His disciples. He is now talking specifically to His own and warns us here of a time of great trouble. The time He is talking about is not any specific day, but any day in which the words of these verses are applicable.

“And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see *it*. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after *them*, nor follow *them*. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one *part* under heaven, shineth unto the other *part* under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.”

The warning continues in verse 26. “*And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.*” Notice that our Savior specifically says, “*in the days (not day) of the Son of man.*” He is talking about any day when He appears to make Himself known: His first advent, His second advent, or His day of grace when He comes to save chosen sinners.

While most are convinced that the verses before us are talking about our Lord’s coming in judgment at the last day, I am convinced otherwise. In this passage our Savior is talking to His disciples about God’s great distinguishing grace. Everything in life decidedly illustrates and confirms His doctrine (Matthew 11:25-26).

## The State of Man

In verses 26-30 our Lord teaches us a lesson about the state of man in this world, a lesson about fallen humanity that we tend to forget. The lesson is this: — Man never changes. We all tend to think that the present generation is the worst that has ever lived. Do not misunderstand me. I do not in anyway minimize or excuse the horrid ungodliness of this generation. But, in these verses our Lord Jesus tells us plainly that the state of man upon the earth

today is exactly as it was in the days of Noah and in the days of Lot. The human race is not getting better, and, really, it is not getting worse. It is just bigger and less capable of hiding the things it would like to hide.

In the days of Noah, before God finally destroyed the whole race, except for Noah and his family, in the flood of his wrath, the whole human race lived to gratify their own lusts, and nothing more. The same was true in the days of Lot. The same thing is true today. And that is the way things will continue, until Christ comes again to gather His elect unto glory in complete salvation and to destroy the rest of the world in the execution of His just wrath.

What is the state and condition of this world? What is the state and condition of mankind? Let me make the question more personal. What is your state and condition before God right now? If you are without Christ, turn to the book of Genesis, and see. Read what God says, and tremble. Tremble, because this is the state you are in. You are ripe for and incessantly asking for the wrath of God.

Our Lord's comparison between the days preceding His own coming and the days of Noah and Lot throws us back to the book of Genesis, chapters 6, 18, and 19. In those days, as in ours, ungodliness, corruption, lust, vanity, pleasure, engrossment with the business of life in this world so utterly consumed the hearts of men, that there was no room for God, either in man's thoughts or his world (Genesis 6:2, 5). Men and women lived, but lived as they pleased, gratifying their own lusts in this world. They had no other concern than food and drink, family and home, business and pleasure.

The same was true in Sodom (Genesis 18:21). When the Lord God looked upon that city, He saw one righteous man there who "*vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds*" (2 Peter 2:8).

I cannot help noticing that our Lord makes no mention of the horrid perversity of homosexuality practiced in Sodom in either Matthew or in Luke as He describes the wickedness of Lot's

generation. Why? The omission is certainly not intended to imply that there is nothing in that reprobate behavior, so common and so promoted in our day, to make rational men shudder and cringe with anger. That immoral conduct is ever the result of self-willed idolatry, the ruin of social order and decency, and the result of divine judgment upon men.

So why didn't the Savior mention the one horrid sin for which Sodom is known throughout the world? The reason is obvious: — He would have all to understand that all who live unto themselves, for themselves, with no regard for God, His Son, His gospel and eternity, are like those reprobate, filthy Sodomites, "*children of wrath*," abiding under the wrath of God, courting eternal damnation.

The just and righteous sentence of God upon Noah's generation and upon Sodom was announced, and men were urged to repent by God's servants; but they continued in their hellish rebellion, living in the lust of their own hearts until Noah entered into the ark and the Lord God rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom (Genesis 6:3, 7, 13; 19:11-14). Yet, even in those evil days, the Lord God had an elect remnant He was determined to save, and He would not destroy the world until Noah was safe in the ark, or Sodom until Lot was safe in Zoar.

*"The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water"* (1 Peter 3:20). So it is now. And so it shall be until the end of time. God's determination to save His elect makes Him long-suffering toward them, because He is not willing that any should perish, but that every loved, chosen, redeemed sinner be saved. And His long-suffering is the salvation of his people (2 Peter 3:9, 15; Genesis 19:17-22). As in the days of Noah and Lot, God's sovereign, distinguishing grace was both manifest and effectual, so it is now and so it shall be until time shall be no more. — "*Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*" And Christ, the Angel of the Lord, brought Lot out of Sodom, "*the Lord being merciful unto him!*"

Read verse 30 and rejoice! — "*Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.*" Oh, clap your hands and

sing praise! *“The foundation of God standeth sure. The Lord knoweth them that are His.”* He knows how to deliver His own; and He will!

## God's Distinguishing Grace

In verses 30-36 the Lord Jesus displays the distinguishing grace of our God, calling us to continually consecrate ourselves to Him. As in Noah's day and in Lot's day, so it is today. None will repent and believe, until the Lord God almighty, by an act of omnipotent grace, brings them into the Ark Christ Jesus, and mercifully forces them to flee for their lives from Sodom, finding refuge in Zoar. But, blessed be His name forever, some shall be shut up in the Ark. Some shall flee to Christ. God will see to it. *“Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.”*

The Lord God has mercy on whom He will have mercy. He saved Abel and passed by Cain. He saved Noah and his family and passed by the world. He chose Abraham and passed by all the rest of the inhabitants of Ur. He saved Lot and passed by his wife, his sons-in-law, and his other daughters, along with all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. He loved Jacob and hated Esau. He takes one as it pleases Him, and passes by another as it pleases Him.

## An Undivided Heart

Here is a third lesson plainly taught in our text: — The Lord Jesus Christ demands consecration to Himself. He demands an undivided heart (vv. 31-33).

*“In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.”*

What a solemn warning our Lord here gives us about divided allegiance. He says to all who profess to be His disciples, “Remember Lot’s wife.” Remember, she left Sodom with her husband, Lot. Remember, she was married to a righteous man. Remember, she worshipped God with Abraham. Remember, she willfully disobeyed God’s explicit command. She looked back! Why did she look back? She had a divided heart. She left Sodom with Lot, but she left her heart in Sodom. Remember, she perished with the Sodomites, though she was standing in the presence and company of three angels and her righteous husband. God struck her dead in an instant! Remember this, too: — As it was in that day, so it is today, and so it shall be until the end of days. There are many who make a profession of faith because they fear the wrath of God, who live with their hearts in Sodom, many who hope to go to heaven with a divided heart. It shall not happen. “*Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.*”

## Eagles and the Carcass

“*And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together*” (v. 37). — The disciples failed to understand what the Lord was saying, as they often did and we often do. They wanted to know where this manifestation and division would take place, looking upon our Lord’s words as a prediction of something that was to take place at a specific time and in a specific place.

What is the meaning of our Lord’s answer? Modern translations have not helped, but only compounded the confusion. Most translate the word “*body*” as “carcass” and the word “eagles” as “vultures.” In both cases such translations are wrong. Our translation is exactly as it should be. “*He said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.*” The word “*body*” means the body of one who has been slain. Notice the definite article. Our Lord said, “*Wheresoever the body is* (not wheresoever bodies are), *thither will the eagles be*

*gathered together.*” Also, notice that He speaks of eagles (not buzzards) in the plural.

Remember the context. Our Lord is talking to us about the distinguishing grace of God. He is talking about faith in Himself. The body of the One slain is our Lord Jesus Christ. “*The eagles*” are God’s elect who are gathered to Him in faith. Let’s see if the Book of God teaches this.

God’s elect are spoken of in the Scriptures as eagles (Deuteronomy 32:8-12; Job 9:25-26; Isaiah 41:31; Revelation 12:14). Our Lord’s answer to His disciples’ question, “*Where, Lord?*” is this: — “Wherever Christ crucified is set forth in the preaching of the Gospel, wherever the crucified Christ is revealed to men by the power and grace of His Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel, there will His elect be gathered unto Him *‘in the day when the Son of man is revealed.’*”

Christ’s eagles “gather” to Him who is their food. He is the One upon whom we live. He is to us life eternal. The body of our slain Savior, Christ crucified, is the meeting-point of His elect. He is the great magnet drawing needy souls like eagles to the carcass. He said, “*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*”

God our Creator in the Book of Job says of the eagle, His creature, “*she abideth upon the rock from thence she seeketh the prey; her eyes behold afar off... where the slain are, there is she.*” God our Savior adds His application: As the eagles gather round the corpse, so the souls of men chosen, redeemed, and called by My grace are gathered unto Me.

Keen and swift as eagles for the prey, so are God’s elect for Christ crucified. These are the words of our blessed Savior. Let not one of them fall to the ground. — “*Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.*”

The eagle is a bird of prey. In all birds of prey there is great, vast quickness of scent to smell their proper food, even from a great distance. Added to its sense of smell, the eagle has a ravenous appetite. Compelled by hunger and its sense of smell, it flies quickly, at every opportunity, to its feast.

But the eagle is not a vulture. It does not feed on dead things, but living. And the crucified Christ, upon whom our souls feed, though once slain as our Substitute, is alive for evermore!

If Christ has given us life in Himself, if He has made us alive by His grace, He gives us a continually increasing appetite and hunger for Himself. Does he not? Do you not hunger for Him, for His grace, for His embrace, for His righteousness, for His blood, for His presence? Hungering for Him, His eagles fly to the place where He is, as famished birds hastening to the prey: His house, His Word, His ordinances, His throne of grace. "If," Robert Hawker observed, "Jesus be indeed the one blessed object of thy desire, will not this be manifested by the earnestness of thy desires?"

As David longed for the waters of Bethlehem when he was thirsty, O let my soul long for Christ. "*As the hart panteth after the water brooks,*" so he longed for his God. May the same be true of you and me. Oh for grace to have my soul hungering for Christ crucified day and night! As the eagles gather together unto the prey, so should we be found feasting upon Christ crucified relentlessly. In Him, in His glorious excellencies is everything our souls need. His name is our salvation and our high tower. His blood is our atonement. His righteousness is our dress. His perfections are our delight. His promises are our meditation. His grace is our assurance. His visits are our sweet memories. His presence is our joy. His strength is our comfort. His glory is our ambition. His coming is our hope. His company forever is our heaven!

Wherever Christ is, there will His people fly, as eagles to the prey and as doves to their windows (Isaiah 40:8).

# Chapter 105

## The Parable of the Unjust Judge

### Luke 18:1-8

“And he spake a parable unto them [to this end], that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:1-8)

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God is our Savior. We live by the merit of His imputed righteousness, the efficacy of His sin-atoning blood, and the power of His omnipotent grace. And our great Savior was and is in all things our example. Let none imagine that His life was nothing more than an example. Yet, we must never fail to see that He is the example by which we must seek to pattern our lives (1 Peter 2:21-24).

He says, “*I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done*” (John 13:15). He shows us by example how to love God and one another. He shows us by example how to suffer patiently, committing ourselves unto our God. He shows us by example how to live in this world by faith, believing God and

servicing him. In all things, Christ Himself is the pattern we are to follow.

As in all other things, our blessed Savior was supremely exemplary in prayer. When He exhorts us to continue in prayer and to “*pray without ceasing*,” He is only telling us to do as He has done. If ever there was a man who might have no need to engage in prayer, it would have been the God-man. He was never defiled with the sins that constantly beset us. He had no lusts of the flesh warring in His members. He is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. He knew no sin, did no sin, and had no sin. He walked with God perfectly, in complete obedience to the Father’s will, ever doing those things that please Him, always glorifying Him in thought, in word, and in deed. Add to that the fact that this man, the God-man, had (even while He walked on the earth) in His possession all omnipotence as God, and you cannot help being astonished that He is the supreme example of faith and prayer.

## Prayer

Luke tells us, as he introduces the parable of the unjust judge, that the lesson, the message of the parable is just this: — “*Men ought always to pray, and not to faint!*” As one of the old writers put it, “He hangs the key at the door.” So the first thing we see in this parable is this word of instruction about prayer. — “*Men ought always to pray and not to faint.*”

The subject of prayer is one that always arouses my interest, though it always causes me to blush with shame. I fear I know very little about it. Prayer is the life breath of the believing heart. J. C. Ryle was exactly right when he wrote, “Here it is that religion begins. Here it flourishes. Here it decays. Prayer is one of the first evidences of conversion (Acts 9:11). Neglect of prayer is the sure road to a fall (Matthew 26:40-41).” Our Savior says, “*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.*”

In this parable the Lord Jesus instructs us in the matter of prayer by telling a story. It is a story about a poor, needy widow, who obtained justice from a wicked judge simply because she

would not leave him alone, until she got what she needed from him. She would not leave him alone, because she was in a pinch. She had to have what he alone could give her. She would not leave him alone, because she had no one else to whom she could turn for help. She got what she needed by the sheer force of her importunity. The judge said, "*Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her* (I will see that she gets justice), *lest by her continual coming she weary me.*"

The Savior tells us the meaning of this in verses 6-8. — "And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." He says, "The day is soon to come when the Lord God will avenge His chosen. He will do that which is right and just for them and with them. He will satisfy all their needs, all the cravings of their souls, for which they continually cry unto Him day and night. He will not put them off forever. He will avenge them speedily."

If the constant, importunate cries of this widow stirred up the heartless judge to avenge her of her adversary, how much more shall the cries of our hearts to our God stir up our heavenly Father, the Judge of all the earth who must do right, to avenge us of our adversary the devil!

## Pray Always?

But is it possible for us to pray always? There are some who take these words very literally and vainly imagine that they are praying as they try to constantly repeat the words of scripted prayers, usually rubbing their magical prayer beads as the do. That is the whole notion behind monastic and cloistral religion. Needless to say, that is not what our Lord is teaching here. Such religious insanity, self-righteousness, and idolatry is not prayer.

Our Lord's words here, "*Men ought always to pray,*" simply mean that we ought always to live looking to our God in faith, constantly carrying our needs and our hearts desires to Him. Our

Master gives us similar instructions in other places (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Colossians 4:2; Hebrews 4:16).

We are to “*continue in prayer.*” That is the sense of our Lord’s doctrine in Luke 18. He does not tell us to pray all the time. That would be impossible. He is telling us to live in the spirit and attitude of prayer and fellowship with God. Again, I am not suggesting that we neglect the act of prayer, or fail to spend time alone with God in prayer. Not at all. Let us pray more and pray frequently about all things.

“*Watch in the same.*” Let us ever be watchful over our souls and watchful for one another in prayer, ever looking to our God for mercy and grace. How we need to take care to be watchful, lest we sleep. “*Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving*” (Colossians 4:2). To live in watchful prayer and faith is to live with thankful hearts before God (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). It is the will of God that we rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks to Him in everything. Whatever our present situation is at anytime is the will of God for us (Romans 8:28). We should rejoice and give thanks always (Philippians 4:4-6).

Rejoice in prosperity or adversity. Pray always. Live prayerfully, trusting the Lord. Let praise, prayer, and thanksgiving constantly rise from our hearts to our God. Let us place such high value upon Christ, His righteousness, His boundless grace, His blood atonement, and life eternal from Him, in Him and with Him that nothing in this life overshadows God’s unspeakable gift. How can I complain about anything when I am an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ?

Our Lord Jesus does not require that we be constantly engaged in the exercise of prayer, but that we always live prayerfully. By all means, spend much time in the exercise of prayer, but more, importantly, live prayerfully.

### “Faint Not”

Let us never weary of faith. Let us never get tired of living upon the bounty of our God, of coming to the throne of grace. Can you imagine the hungry widow becoming weary of going to the barrel

God constantly filled and getting food for her and her son? Yet, our flesh is so opposed to all that is good for our souls that our Lord constantly reminds us that we must watch, and pray, and faint not! Why are these admonitions so often repeated and in so many ways? Because they are admonitions we need, and need constantly!

Our Lord is not telling us in the parable that if we have a great desire, if we want something bad enough, we ought to just keep asking God for what we want until he gives it. James tells us plainly that such praying is praying amiss (James 3:3).

God never promised to gratify our lusts, not even when our lusts appear to be good and reasonable desires. We do not twist God's arm in prayer, forcing the Almighty to bow to our will! In prayer we pour out the groans of our hearts to Him and bow to His will. Have you no groans, groans for which you cry unto God day and night, groans created in you by His grace, groans that will not allow you rest until they are fulfilled? Of course you do, if you are God's. I do, too.

We groan for freedom from sin. We groan that we might be conformed to Christ, We groan for our lack of love for God our Savior, our lack of faith before Him, our lack of commitment and devotion to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. How we groan before our God for an end of strife, for peace, and an end to sorrow and sighing, toil and temptation, pain and causing pain, grief and causing grief!

In the parable of the unjust judge our Lord tells us to never quit seeking God's grace, to never quit living by faith, looking to Him and looking for Him (Philippians 3:7-14; Hebrews 12:14). His grace will prove sufficient and satisfactory, even when He denies us what we crave for ourselves. Our Lord's promise, the promise drawn from the parable of the unjust judge is just this. — As that unjust judge avenged that helpless widow of her adversary, so too our heavenly Father will soon avenge us of our adversary (Romans 16:20; Revelation 22:4-7). At the appointed hour, the God of Glory, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ gave Him the glory He promised Him. And at the appointed hour, He will give us the glory He has promised us. Let

us therefore pray always and faint not (Hebrews 10:35-39; Habakkuk 2:3).

## Election

The second thing we see in our Lord's explanation of this parable is the fact that there is an elect people in this world, loved of God and the objects of his constant care. The Lord Jesus declares that God will "*avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him.*" "*I tell you,*" He says, "*that he will avenge them speedily.*"

God's elect are His own special, peculiar people, whom He has loved with an everlasting love. We are His by His own sovereign good will and pleasure, chosen in His Son Jesus Christ unto everlasting life and salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. He will avenge them of their adversary and vindicate them before all worlds at the last day, right all wrongs concerning them, do them justice, and deliver them into His heavenly kingdom and glory. And He will do so in accordance with absolute, strict justice, through the merit and efficacy of Christ's obedience, death, and intercession.

## A Bag, a Book, a Bottle

Like this poor widow, they cry unto Him day and night. He hears our cries, puts our tears up in His bottle. In a word He cares for us and takes care of us at all times, in all our needs, and forever.

God takes great care to comfort his people in their many trials and sorrows in this world. He commands his preachers to have for one of their goals the comfort of his people. He says, "*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.*" Here are three things described in the Word of God that should be of great comfort to every believer.

The Lord God has made a bag for our sins. Job said, "*My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity*" (Job 14:17). In ancient times, when men died at sea, their bodies were placed in a weighted bag, which was sewn

together and sealed. Then they were cast into the depths of the sea. That is what God has done with our sins. They are cast *“into the depths of the sea.”* When Christ died, by His one sacrifice for our sins, which were imputed to Him, He put away all our sins. They were buried in the sea of God’s infinite forgiveness, put away, never to be brought up again. God almighty will never charge us with sin, impute sin to us, remember our sins against us, or treat us any the less graciously because of our sin. That is forgiveness! — *“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”*

The Lord has also written a book for our names. Take heart, child of God. Your name is written in the book of God. Before the worlds were made, the Lord God inscribed the names of His elect in the Lamb’s book of life. In that book God has recorded not only the names of the chosen heirs of heaven, but also all things pertaining to them. *“In thy book all my members were written”* (Psalm 139:16; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 17:8). The Lamb’s book of life is the book of God’s eternal purpose of grace, predestination, and election. The fact that our names are written in that book means that our salvation is a matter of absolute certainty, and that all things work together for our good by God’s arrangement to secure our predestined end, which is perfect conformity to Christ (Romans 8:28-30). When our Lord says, *“Rejoice because your names are written in heaven,”* He is telling us that we have nothing to fear. All is well for those whose names are written in heaven.

Moreover, the Lord God keeps a bottle for our tears. *“Thou tellest all my wonderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?...This I know; for God is for me”* (Psalm 56:8-9). It was customary at ancient Egyptian funerals for mourners to have a small cloth or sponge to wipe away their tears. Then, they were squeezed into a small vial, a tear bottle, and placed in the tomb with the dead, symbolizing the care the mourners had for the one who had died. Even so, the Lord our God, our heavenly Father, our almighty Savior, and our holy Comforter, tenderly cares for us. In all our afflictions He is afflicted. We are the very apple of His eye!

Could anything be more comforting in this world of sin, sorrow, and death? The Lord our God has put our sins in a bag and buried them, our names in a book to remember them, and our tears into a bottle to show His tender care for us. All this shows our Father's care for his elect.

How we rejoice in God's electing love! It is one of the sweetest, most blessed, most soul-cheering things revealed in the Book of God (John 15:16; Ephesians 1:3-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Election is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, He has decreed in sovereign predestination to deliver the objects of His eternal love from sin, the curse of the law, and eternal damnation, and to deliver them unto eternal glory in, by, and with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Election is the guarantee of eternal salvation by Christ our Surety and the source of all spiritual and eternal blessedness. Little wonder that David danced before the ark when he thought about God's election (Psalm 65:4). Election calls for unceasing praise and thanksgiving to our God. Except God had chosen and called us, we would never have chosen and called on him. Except He had chosen us of His own good pleasure, unconditionally, we could never have been chosen, for we could never make ourselves worthy of His choice. Let the Arminian, the works-monger, the will-worshipper rail, and rant, and rave on. We rejoice in electing love! We bless God for the blessing wherewith He has blessed us — Eternal Election! We know and rejoice to sing...

“Tis not that I did choose Thee,  
For, Lord, that could not be;  
This heart would still refuse Thee,  
Hadst Thou not chosen me:  
Thou, from the sin that stained me,  
Hast washed and set me free,  
And to this end ordained me,  
That I should live to Thee.

“Twas sovereign mercy called me,

And taught my opening mind,  
The world had else enthralled me,  
To heavenly glories blind:  
My heart owns none before Thee,  
For Thy rich grace I thirst —  
This knowing, if I love Thee,  
Thou must have loved me first!”

Are there any marks of election, any tokens by which I can know whether I am one of God’s elect? Indeed, there are! These marks are clearly laid down in Scripture. Election is inseparably connected with faith in Christ and conformity to His image (Romans 8:29-30). When Paul saw the working “*faith*,” and patient “*hope*,” and laboring “*love*” of the Thessalonians, he knew their “*election of God*” (1 Thessalonians 1:3, 4.). Our Lord gives us this mark of election in the passage before us. God’s elect are a people who “*cry unto him day and night.*”

And, yes, God shall avenge us. He shall avenge his own elect, “*though He bear long with them.*” Perhaps these words refer to our adversaries, oppressors, and persecutors. They are vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction. The Lord God endures their wickedness with much longsuffering toward His elect, until the sufferings of His people are accomplished and the iniquities of these reprobate are full.

However, I think the words, “*though He bear long with them*” are most properly to be understood as referring to the elect. They might be better translated, “and is longsuffering towards them.” He delays the execution of vengeance upon the world of the ungodly until all His elect are gathered in from among them. Then, our Savior says, “*I tell you, He will avenge them speedily*” (v. 8; 2 Peter 3:9, 15).

## A Solemn Question

The third thing we see in this passage is the fact that true faith will be a scarce and rare thing in the last day. Our Savior shows us this by asking a very solemn question in verse 8. — “*When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*” The answer

is obvious. As it was in the days of Noah and Lot, so shall it be when the Lord Jesus comes again. In the days of Noah only eight souls entered into the ark. In the days of Lot only three were delivered from wrath and judgment. All the rest perished. So shall it be in the end of the world.

*“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”* If you do, bless God for His free electing love and the gift of His grace upon you. If you believe, salvation and eternal life is yours in Christ. But, if you believe not the Son of God, the wrath of God abides on you and you shall never see life (John 3:36; 8:24).

# Chapter 106

## Self-righteousness

### Luke 18:9-14

“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men [are], extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as [his] eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified [rather] than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14).

Self-righteousness is the subject of the parable before us. I cannot imagine a subject more disgustingly repugnant, or more commonly and universally indulged. Luke gives us an inspired introduction to the parable in verse 9. — “*And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.*” That which our Lord here denounces is self-righteousness. The purpose of our Lord in this parable is to show the folly and danger of self-righteousness.

### All Self-righteous

All men, by nature, are self-righteous. It is the family disease of

all the sons of Adam. From the heights to the depths of society, we all think more highly of ourselves than we should. We secretly flatter ourselves that we are not so bad as some, and that we have something that will recommend us to the favor of God. The wise man said, *“Most men will proclaim everyone his own goodness.”* We forget the plain testimony of Holy Scripture. — *“In many things we offend all”* (James 3:2). — *“There is not a man upon the earth, that doeth good and sinneth not”* (Ecclesiastes 7:10). — *“What is man that he should be clean, or he that is born of woman that he should be righteous”* (Job 15:14). — *“They are all under sin; as it is written, there is none righteous, no not one”* (Romans 3:9-10).

Ever since man became a sinner, he has been self-righteous. When man had a perfect righteousness before God, he did not glory in it nor cherish it; but ever since man has fallen and lost all righteousness, he has pretended to be righteous! Immediately after his fall, Adam wrapped himself in his apron of fig leaves and began to defend himself by blaming his troubles on God, who gave to him the woman, and the woman for giving him the fruit.

As it was with Adam, so it is with all men; we justify ourselves before God and men. Self-righteousness is born within us; and while we can, to a degree, control lust, lies, and murder, our self-righteousness will not allow us to confess our sins and come to God for mercy as guilty sinners. Millions of sermons have been preached against self-righteousness, but it remains the number one sin that keeps people from coming to Christ.

One old preacher said, “I scarcely ever preach a sermon without condemning self-righteousness, yet I find I cannot preach it down. Men still boast of who they are, what they have done, what they have not done, and mistake the road to heaven to be one paved by their own works and merit.” God help us!

This parable was addressed to the Lord’s disciples. Multitudes who profess faith in Christ, who avow that the ground of their hope and the foundation of their salvation is Christ alone, and confess that they trust in the merits of Christ, ultimately make Christ only half a Savior. You would never be so bold as to

say that you do not need Him at all. But, then, you are highly offended when you are told that your heart is as black, and vile, and corrupt as hell itself. Why is that? Is it not because you trust in yourselves that you are righteous? I plead with you for your very soul's sake, be honest. You think, "I know I am not as good as I should be, but then I am not so bad as some people. I go to church regularly. I read my Bible. I say my prayers. I am sober, honest, and moral." — Are you not self-righteous?

## One Cure

There is only one true cure for self-righteousness, and that is self-knowledge. All the descendants of Adam are sinners, destitute of righteousness, and filled with unrighteousness. Out of your "*heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*" The same is true of my own.

By nature, we are all enemies to righteousness. And we have no power to make ourselves righteous. No matter how righteous you may be in the eyes of men, or in your own eyes, you have no righteousness, unless you have the righteousness of Christ. If it were possible for men to gain righteousness for themselves, then Christ is dead in vain (Galatians 2:21).

Once let the eyes of our understanding be opened by the Spirit of God, and all self-righteousness must fade away. We will talk no more of our own goodness, when we behold His goodness. Once let us see what there is in our hearts, and what the holy law of God requires, and self-conceit will die. Oh, if we can but get a sight of the thrice holy Jehovah, we will cry with Isaiah, "*Woe is me!*" We will lay our hands upon our mouths, and cry with the leper, "*Unclean, unclean!*"

Everyone who goes to the house of worship is set forth in this parable. You either come to God like the self-righteous Pharisee, or you come like the self-abased Publican. May God the Holy Spirit use the study of this parable to the awakening of the self-righteous, to the comfort of those who labor and are heavy laden with sin, and to the edification of all who believe, for the glory of Christ.

## Outwardly the Same

There is one point at which the Pharisee and the Publican agree. There is one thing that they had in common. They both “*went up into the temple to pray.*” They both set their faces in the same direction. Outwardly, they both walked in the same path. They entered the same house. So far as we can see, there was no difference whatever in their outward religious behavior.

The Pharisee and the Publican in this parable remind me of the first men who worshipped God, Cain and Abel. There was a mighty gulf between them. God accepted the one and rejected the other. The difference between the two was in their heart. Cain had a heart full of pride. Because he trusted in himself that he was righteous, God rejected him. Abel had a heart full of shame because of sin. Because he trusted Christ as the Lord his Righteousness, God accepted him. Which are you, the proud, self-righteous Pharisee, or the broken, self-abasing Publican?

Robert Hawker rightly summarized the message of our Lord’s parable when he wrote, “The Pharisee and Publican are as much living characters now, as then, in the days of our Lord. Every man is a Pharisee that is seeking acceptance with God either whole or in part, who prides himself upon his own good deeds, and prayers, and sacraments, and almsgiving; and hath recourse to Christ no further according to his will than to make up (if there should be any) his own deficiency. And every man may be called a Publican, in the sense of this parable, who from the teaching of God the Spirit hath been led to behold the Adam-nature in which he was born, and the condemnation in which he is involved, both by original, and by actual transgression; and led by the Holy Ghost to God in Christ, acknowledgeth himself unmeriting forgiveness, while in sorrow and contrition he seeks it. Justification is of God in Christ. And therefore the self-condemned, and not the self-righteous, find justification before God.”

## Their Character

Though they were outwardly the same, in this passage our Lord Jesus points out four great differences between the Pharisee and the Publican. He begins the parable by pointing out that there was a difference in the character of these two men. — *“The one a Pharisee, the other a Publican.”*

It would be impossible to imagine a more striking contrast in the opinion of the Jewish nation during the time of our Lord’s earthly ministry. In the minds of those ancient Jews, the Pharisee represented the epitome of morality and righteousness. And the Publican was looked upon with more disgust than a harlot or a drunkard. Publicans represented the depths of sin and degradation.

One of these men was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were the most ancient sect of the Jews. They were thoroughly orthodox in their doctrine. They believed in the inspiration of Scripture. They believed in the Messiah. They believed in election, predestination, and limited atonement. They never dreamed that any were God’s elect but the Jews, or that atonement was made for any but the nation of Israel. They believed in the resurrection of the dead. They even believed in the future punishment of the wicked, and eternal bliss of the righteous.

The Pharisees were very strict in their observance of the law and the traditions of the church. They prayed three times in the day. They fasted twice a week. They gave tithes of everything they possessed. They strictly observed the ceremonies of the law. They were meticulous in their observance of the Sabbath day. They wouldn’t think of missing a church service, or working on the sabbath.

But everything the Pharisees did was to be seen of men. They stood in corners of the streets and made long prayers, so that men coming from both directions could see and hear them. Our Lord tells us that they *“made broad the borders of their phylacteries.”* That is to say, they sewed pieces of parchment on their long robes, which had Scripture texts written on them, so that all men could see how much they loved the law of God.

If they were living today, they would have their shirt pockets stuffed with tracts, carry large Bibles everywhere they go, put bumper stickers on their car saying, “Jesus saves!”, or “Honk if you love Jesus!”, and write, “I love Jesus”, on park benches and overpasses, march in the streets to protest abortion and pornography, and have the Ten Commandments hung in all public buildings. The Pharisees were the most religious people in the world, and everyone knew it. All of their religious exercises were designed to win the applause of men.

There are many today like these Pharisees. They keep up the outward duties of religion so that they may either gain or keep the respect of men. They suppose that, by their religious works, they make God their debtor. They despise all other men, thinking themselves holier than others, who do not observe their traditions. They say, “*Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.*”

This is far different from the true believer. Those who trust Christ for righteousness know that they are, in themselves, poor, miserable, and guilty. They freely admit that others are much better than they. They despise no one (Philippians 3:3).

The other man in the parable was a Publican. To the Jews, nothing was more offensive than a Publican. The Publicans were Jews who collected taxes for the Roman government. They usually exacted much more than was due from their countrymen so as to amass wealth for themselves. They were looked upon both by the Jews and the Romans as disgraceful and contemptible. The Jews could make no more vile accusation of Christ’s character than to say that he was the friend of Publicans and sinners.

## Their Behavior

There was a difference in the behavior of these two worshippers, too. Look at the proud Pharisee. – “*The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself.*” The Pharisee went up as close as he could get to the holy place and stood in some conspicuous place so that he could be seen by all. He stood in a fixed, formal

posture. He stood apart from the other worshippers, lest he should be defiled, or be thought to be “*as other men are.*” He stood with great boldness and confidence, as though God were indebted to him. He stood and prayed with himself.

His prayer was altogether centered in himself. He sought nothing but his own glory. He stood before God, being confident of his own righteousness. He stood by himself, with no respect to or faith in Christ the Mediator. Though he addressed God, he praised his own self. We see nothing of humility in this man. He had no inclination even to bow his head before his Creator, much less his heart.

Now, look at the Publican. — “*The Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast.*” The Publican stood afar off in the outer court, as one who was unworthy to enter the presence of Him whose name is Holy. This was a testimony of the sense he had of his state and condition before God. He was an unworthy sinner, far off from God, and deserving to be separated from God forever. This was also a display of his reverence for God. This Publican was not even willing to look up toward heaven.

J. C. Ryle said, “He felt the remembrance of his sins so grievous, and the burden of them so intolerable, that, like a child who has offended its father, he dare not look his Almighty Maker in the face.”

The guilt of his sins lay so heavily upon him that he could not look up to heaven. A sense of sin made him blush with shame. Sorrow caused his heart to bow in brokenness and contrition before the throne of God. He was possessed with a fear of God’s well-deserved wrath. This poor sinner knew he was unworthy of any favor from God.

In sorrow, self-abasement, and godly fear, the Publican “*smote upon his breast.*” He was so overcome by the sinfulness of his heart that he could not control his feelings. He remembered his many sins. He recalled the mercies he had received, and his neglect of them. He knew the life he had led and the God he had despised. And these things came crushing upon his heart like an

intolerable burden. He beat upon his breast, pointing to his heart as the fountain of his sins. He beat upon his breast, expressing his sorrow and repentance of sin. He beat upon his breast, showing his abhorrence of sin.

## Their Prayers

*Third*, our Lord shows us a marked difference in the prayers of these two men. Look first at the Pharisee's pretentious prayer. We can hardly call it a prayer. While he does address himself to God, and acknowledges God's right to some gratitude upon his part, this proud hypocrite was wrong in everything he said. — *"God I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess."*

There are several things that are obviously missing in the Pharisee's prayer. There is no confession of sin. There is no expression of desire for the glory of God. There is no praise to God. There is no hint of need before God. This man was perfectly self-satisfied and self-sufficient. He recites complacently in what he is not, and proudly boasts of what he is. He gives thanks to God, but only in order to exalt himself.

Proudly, he denies being like other men. He was indeed like all other men. He was a sinner in Adam, he was a sinner by nature, and he was a sinner in heart, just like all other men. He goes on and denies particular sins, of which the Pharisees were guilty. They were guilty of extortion, devouring widow's houses under religious pretense. They were unjust, being aptly represented by our Lord as unjust stewards. And they were adulterers; our Lord called them an adulterous generation.

Even as he made this prayer, this Pharisee was guilty of all these things before God. He was robbing God of his glory. He was unjustly claiming a right to God's favor. He was guilty of spiritual adultery, worshipping himself, the worst adultery of all.

Even if he had obeyed the letter of the law perfectly, he was wrong to suppose that the literal fulfillment of the law would

merit God's favor. — *“By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.”*

The Pharisee judged himself by the wrong standard. He compared himself with other men. And he proved himself to be the child of the devil by accusing his brother.

There is no soul in such a dangerous position as the religious hypocrite. No man is in such a hopeless condition as the Pharisee, who has no deep feeling of his own sinfulness. No heart is harder to reach than that which is dead in self-righteous religion.

Now look at the Publican's prayer. — *“He smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.”* This prayer was most instructive, though it was very short. There was a personal, sincere, and full confession of sin. This publican did not confess anyone else's sins, but his own. He made no excuse for his sin. And this man confessed that he was the greatest sinner who ever lived. A more literal translation of his words would be, “God, be merciful to me the sinner.” He confessed his sinful nature and his sinful deeds. He speaks as though he were the only sinner in the world. He confesses that God would be perfectly just to punish him in hell forever.

This man made his suit for mercy at the throne of the sovereign God. God was the one he had offended, and God alone could forgive. He pleads with God whose prerogative it is to have mercy on whom He will. He made no promise of reformation, but simply pleaded for mercy. He came with nothing to offer, simply pleading for mercy.

This Publican pleaded for mercy with faith in Christ. The word that is here translated *“be merciful to”* is found only one other time in the New Testament in Hebrews 2:17. There it is applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, our High Priest. *“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.”* The word “merciful” means propitious, or reconciling.

The Publican prayed that God would show him mercy through the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, typified under the

law. He knew that God could show mercy only by the blood sacrifice of Christ. God forgives sin only when the satisfactory payment has been made. This sinner confessed his entire dependence upon Christ, the Mediator whom God provides, knowing that God must pardon sin in a way that is consistent with his justice. Here is a sinner's plea, — "*For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great*" (Psalm 25:11).

## Their End

*Fourth*, I want you to see that the Pharisee and the Publican were different in their end. — "*I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*" The proud Pharisee, though he was righteous in his own eyes, was rejected by God. The poor Publican was justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone. That is to say, he received God's free gift of justification by faith in Christ. The blood of Christ sprinkled upon his conscience justified him in his own conscience before God. He came up to the temple with a tormenting, guilty conscience. He went home with a conscience of peace, reconciled to God by faith in Christ.

And our Lord Jesus tells us that all who exalt themselves in self-righteousness shall be abased by God. And all who humble themselves in repentance will be exalted with Christ.

## A Bold Prophecy

That which our Lord condemns more severely than any other crime is self-righteousness. I would rather stand before God in the day of judgment as a man guilty of lying, theft, adultery, and murder, than stand before him as a man guilty of self-righteousness. Self-righteousness shall be punished with greater severity in eternal damnation than any other offense.

Our Lord spoke this parable to all who trust in themselves and despise others. Who are these people? The Son of God

declares that all who trust in themselves, all who vainly imagine that they make themselves righteous by something they do, are self-righteous. They ignorantly imagine that they justify themselves (Luke 16:15).

If you will read Isaiah 65:1-7, you will see exactly what God thinks of self-righteousness and what he says about all who trust in themselves that they are righteous, while despising others. The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 10 that Isaiah was very bold in making this prophecy. It required the boldness of firm conviction and divine anointing for the servant of God to speak for God in the day when the people who claimed to worship God were wholly given over to idolatry, superstition, and will worship. It required boldness for the man of God to expose the self-righteousness of his own nation, declaring them to be a people who, because of the delusions of their perverse religion and the depravity of their hearts, were a people — *“Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.”* Then he adds this word from God concerning the people to whom he preached — *“These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.”*

Thus, the prophet of God boldly delivered the Word of the Lord. In a day when the people were wholly given over to legality, he preached the Gospel. When his nation was filled with pride and self-righteousness, proudly presuming that they were alone the people of God, he boldly denounced them as hypocrites. When they thought they had God in their pocket, God’s prophet boldly affirmed God’s electing grace and announced His rejection of the Jewish nation. Perhaps it was his boldness that provoked Manasseh’s wrath, which resulted in Isaiah being cruelly put to death, being sawn asunder by the king’s order.

The sins of Israel were open and undeniable. They pretended to worship the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but did so in total violation of the first and second commandments. They mixed the worship of other gods with the worship of Jehovah. They used icons, images, and symbols in the worship of God. These things were expressly forbidden by God even in the Old

Testament (Exodus 20:3-4). They worshipped the Lord, or at least pretended to, upon ornate altars of brick, altars of their own making, in places of their own choosing. Again, they did so in direct violation of Holy Scripture (Exodus 20:24-26). The Jews even practiced necromancy, pretending that they communed with the dead. They practiced witchcraft and sorcery, incorporating magic into their worship!

To top it all off, they were guilty of horrid self-righteousness. They carried their self-righteousness to such a pitch that they vainly and proudly imagined that if they even rubbed up against someone else on the streets, they would be polluted and defiled. Therefore, the Lord God here declared them to be to Him as smoke in a man's nose, abhorrent and intolerable.

Truly, Isaiah's bold prophecy is as applicable to our day as it was to his. There are many today who pretend to worship the Lord God who must be honestly exposed for that self-righteousness that says, "*Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.*" Multitudes today, who spend every Sunday in the house of God, spend the day as "*a smoke in God's nose.*"

We must constantly guard against self-righteousness. It is at its heart the idea that we can make ourselves righteous, that we obtain righteousness by something we do, because of who we are, who we are related to, what we experience, or what we feel. Self-righteousness is trust in ourselves (Luke 18:9).

Self-righteousness is a refuge of lies, by which men and women deceive their own hearts, a bed that is too short for a man to stretch himself upon it, and a covering too narrow to wrap himself in. It is in God's eyes the most offensive, obnoxious, and loathsome of all evils in this world. Yet, it is that which is most appealing to our flesh, that by which we are most likely to be deceived. Unless God delivers us from the horrible snare of self-righteousness, we will perish forever under his wrath.

## Seven Statements

Here are seven plain statements about self-righteousness. Some of them are biting and painful, I know. Some are very offensive to many. But they must be made. I must be faithful in my generation, as Isaiah was in his, and boldly expose the self-righteousness by which Satan would destroy your soul.

1. Self-righteousness grows and flourishes best in religious soil. This is an enemy found within our own walls. It is not something we have to look for in the dark alleys of the profane. Self-righteousness is perfectly at home in the assembly of God's saints, and in the practice of religious duties (Isaiah 1:10-15; Luke 16:15). Self-righteousness is not an evil found only among the unregenerate and unbelieving of the world. It is an evil with which believers constantly struggle. It is like a huge cob-web on our souls that we simply cannot pull off. You can mark this down as a rule by which to determine whether or not our behavior is self-righteous. Anything done to be seen of and to call the attention of others to ourselves is abhorrently self-righteous (Matthew 6:1-6). Self-righteousness grows and flourishes in religious soil; but you will find it outside the church, too.

2. Self-righteousness is as common among the base and profane of the world as well. This sin abounds where you might least expect it. Nothing is more ridiculous than to hear men and women who are openly vile talk about morality, social values, and ethical uprightness. Yet, we should not be surprised by this. The Scriptures give us examples of such things and warn us that the time would come when men would call good evil and evil good.

3. Self-righteousness always makes men and women harsh, hard, and judgmental regarding others (Luke 18:9).

4. Self-righteousness will not bow to the authority of the Word of God alone. It must have traditions, customs, religious rules and laws, denominational authority, creeds, and confessions and historic backing (Matthew 15:7-9).

5. Self-righteousness will never acknowledge and confess sin.

Believers confess their sins in bitterness of soul (Psalm 51:1-5; 1 John 1:9). Self-righteousness talks about sin in terms of weaknesses and makes excuses for it. Utter, personal depravity, self-righteousness will never acknowledge.

6. Self-righteousness will not trust Christ alone. Our only hope of righteousness is Christ, *“The Lord our Righteousness”* (Jeremiah 23:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31). Self-righteousness makes the obedience, righteousness, and sin-atonement sacrifice of Christ of non-effect (Galatians 2:20-21). But self-righteousness will not submit to the righteousness of God (Romans 9:31-10:4).

7. Self-righteousness most effectually bars a sinner from God’s grace and God’s salvation. Your sin will not keep you from Christ, but your righteousness will. None are too bad to be saved, but multitudes are too good!

## My Confession and My Hope

*“I know that in me, that is, in my flesh dwelleth no good thing.”* From the soul of my foot to the crown of my head, there is no goodness in me, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores (Isaiah 64:6). My only hope before God is Christ, whose name is Jehovah-tsidkenu, *“THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”* (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31)

“Not what these hands have done  
Can save this guilty soul;  
Not what this toiling flesh has borne,  
Can make my spirit whole.

Not what I feel or do,  
Can give me peace with God;  
Not all my prayers, or sighs, or tears,  
Can ease my awful load.

Thy work alone, my Savior,  
Can ease this weight of sin;  
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,  
Can give me peace within.

Thy love to me, O God,  
Not mine, O Lord, to Thee,  
Can rid me of this dark unrest,  
And set my spirit free.

No other work save Thine,  
No meaner blood will do;  
No strength save that which is Divine,  
Can bear me safely through.

Thy grace alone, O God,  
To me can pardon speak;  
Thy power alone, O Son of God,  
Can this sore bondage break.

I bless the Christ of God,  
I rest on love Divine;  
And with unfaltering lip and heart  
I call the Savior mine.”

# Chapter 107

## Infants and the Kingdom of God

### Luke 18:15-17

“And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when [his] disciples saw [it], they rebuked them. But Jesus called them [unto him], and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (Luke 18:15-17).

This short passage of Holy Scripture sets before us one of our Master’s most important lessons. Here our Savior teaches us that all who enter into the Kingdom of God, all who are saved by the grace of God must come to Christ in simple faith, as little children.

Yet, very few passages in the New Testament have been so perversely twisted to teach false doctrine as these three verses. For that reason, I must, at least briefly, address two of the perverse things men most commonly use these verses to teach.

### Infant Baptism

Papists and those who continue to practice the Romish ritual commonly refer to these verses as a defense of sprinkling water on babies, that which is commonly referred to as “infant baptism.”

If there were any place in the Bible where we might expect to

find some mention or example of “infant sprinkling”, this would be the place; but that is not the case. This practice of what is called “infant baptism” is totally without foundation in Holy Scripture. There is not so much as one word in the Bible that teaches, or even implies it. And there is not a single example of it in the entire Bible. It is a practice of purely Roman Catholic origin. It is vainly hoped, by those who practice infant sprinkling, that the baby sprinkled with a little water is thereby regenerated, or at least given one foot up toward God. The practice is, of course, totally contrary to the plainest declaration of Holy Scripture, both with regard to salvation and baptism.

It is a complete contradiction of the Gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ. Salvation does not come by water, be it much or little, but by grace. It is not the result of some man’s priestly pretense, but of God’s sovereign operation.

Infant sprinkling is also totally contrary to the teaching of Holy Scripture about baptism. Baptism is immersion, picturing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and our death, burial, and resurrection with him (Romans 6:3-6). It is called “believer’s baptism”, because only believers are to be baptized. Baptism is the believer’s public, symbolic confession of faith in Christ.

These verses are also used by many to defend the practice of talking little children into making a “decision for Jesus” and calling it salvation. I do not think, or suggest, that the Bible teaches what men call an “age of accountability.” That is not the issue. The issue is faith in Christ. Neither men and women, nor children, who are born of God, need to be manipulated into professing faith in Christ. Indeed, if someone talked you into a profession of faith, you know that it was no more than that. You may hold onto it until you go to hell; but what you have is not salvation, but just a religious profession. When God the Holy Spirit saves sinners, giving them faith in Christ, they are made willing disciples of the Son of God.

## Exposition

Having said that, I will say no more, though much more needs to

be said, said boldly, and said often about such perverse religious practices. Let me give you a brief exposition of these three verses. Then I will give you the Master's message in them.

*“And they brought unto him also infants.”* — The word translated *“infants”* is used with regard to unborn children, little babies, and young children (Luke 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16; 18:15; Acts 7:19; 2 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 2:2). On this occasion, people brought these infants to the Savior, just as others brought adults to him who were sick, that they might be healed by His touch, as we see in the next words.

*“That he would touch them.”* — They brought these children to the Master that he might, as was his custom, heal them of their diseases by touching them.

*“But when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them.”* — The disciples rebuked those who brought these sick children to the Master. We are not told why the disciples' rebuked them. They may very well have had what they thought were good reasons for doing so. In fact, that appears to have been the case, because the Lord Jesus did not in any way scold them for their action. But this much is certain. — They did not bring the children to the Savior to be baptized by him. John Gill explained...

“From this rebuke and prohibition of the disciples, it looks plainly as if it had never been the practice of the Jews, nor of John the Baptist, nor of Christ and His disciples, to baptize infants. Had this been then in use, they would scarcely have forbidden and rebuked those that brought them, since they might have thought they brought them to be baptized. But knowing of no such usage that ever obtained in that nation, neither among those that did, or did not believe in Christ, they forbid them.”

*“But Jesus called them unto him.”* — The Lord Jesus called for these children who were brought to come to Him. That fact is sufficient to tell us that these *“infants”* were not infants in the way we commonly speak of infants. They were obviously young children, probably less than twelve years old, but not new-born

babies, or nursing babies. They were at least old enough to be capable of coming to the Master on their own.

When He called the children to himself, stretching out His arms to receive them, the Master said, to his disciples, “*suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.*” Our Lord Jesus was such a gracious, humble, accommodating man that He readily seized the opportunity to tenderly embrace young children, take them on His lap, and minister to them. He was so gracious, gentle, and kind that young children were perfectly comfortable in approaching Him.

“*For of such is the kingdom of God.*” — It is as if our Lord said, “Don’t drive these children away from Me. Let them come, and I will teach you something. These children are a good picture of what I require all My children to be: trusting and dependent, harmless and inoffensive, free from bitterness and malice, meek, modest, and humble, without pride, arrogance, and ambition, having no desire for greatness, just children.”

“*Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God*” — That is receive Christ as his King, believing His doctrine, bowing to His authority, obeying His will. — “*As a little child*” — In simple faith, meekly, humbly, trusting Him as Lord and Savior — “*Shall in no wise enter therein.*” — In a word, our Savior here tells us that there is no true faith except that faith that is exemplified in childlike qualities. What a profound, needful, vital message this is! May God give us grace to receive it. “*Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.*”

## Four Lessons

There are four things in our Lord’s message that must not go unnoticed.

1. We must understand that when the Lord Jesus comes in saving power and grace into the lives of chosen sinners, He comes as a king to set up His Kingdom. He does not come

begging for admission. He comes into the hearts of chosen sinners in sovereign, omnipotent mercy. He binds Satan, spoils him of his goods, casts him out, and takes possession of his house.

2. If we are to come into this Kingdom, we must be brought to Christ the King, and brought into the Kingdom as little children. Our Master says, "*Of such is the kingdom of heaven*" (v. 17). Mark those words. There are children in every kingdom, and there are children in our Lord's kingdom. John Newton once said, "The majority of persons who are now in the kingdom of God are children." I would not argue the point. When I think of all the multitudes of babies who have died in infancy, who are now swarming in the streets of glory, I rejoice in God's great wisdom and goodness. Though adults, generation after generation, die in rebellion and unbelief, countless multitudes of infant children have entered into the kingdom of heaven, saved by the grace of God, through the death of Christ, and forever sing the high praises of their great Redeemer and Friend before the eternal throne of His glory. — "*Of such is the kingdom of heaven.*"

I have no hesitancy in asserting that infants dying in infancy (That includes the infants slaughtered in abortion, burned upon heathen altars, the infants of Papists, Mohammedans, and Buddhists.) enter the Kingdom God. I am fully convinced that all of our race who die in infancy are the objects of God's eternal love, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and born again by God the Holy Spirit. Let others object, if they please. For my part, I am delighted with this. Everything I read in the Book of God convinces me of it. All who leave this world as babies are saved.

A few years ago, I received a lengthy, sad letter from a dear friend of mine in another state. She and her husband married fairly late in life, just two or three years earlier. They had been trying to have a child. You can imagine their elation when they learned that she was pregnant. Then, my dear friend miscarried. You can imagine their disappointment. She wrote to ask, "Was my unborn child a human being? At what point is an unborn child a living person? Is my child in heaven?" You can imagine my elation as I wrote back and said, "Yes, your baby is one of

Christ's jewels, taken from your womb into His everlasting arms and into His glory.

How are they saved? How do they enter the kingdom? — By works? — By the exercise of their will? Of course not! They enter the Kingdom by the mighty operations of God's free grace. And if we enter the Kingdom of God that is exactly the way we will enter it.

How do they receive the Kingdom? Our Lord Jesus tells us that however they receive it, so must we receive it. Certainly, children do not receive it by birth or blood, for we are expressly told in John's Gospel that the children of God are born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh. All privilege of descent is now abolished, and no baby enters into heaven because it was born of godly parents, neither shall any be shut out because his parents are atheists, or idolaters, or ungodly. If saved, as we assuredly believe they are, infants must be saved simply according to the will and good pleasure of God, because He has made them his own by election, redemption, and regeneration.

Notice this, too. "*They brought unto him infants.*" These young children were brought to Christ. The word means "brought and presented." So sinners, if ever they enter into the Kingdom of God, must be brought by God the Holy Spirit, brought by omnipotent, irresistible grace and power, and presented to Christ, presented to Him as the reward of His soul's travail. Thus, "*He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.*"

3. Our Lord Jesus is a king and His Kingdom a Kingdom that must be received by faith. All Christ's subjects want to be His subjects. All His servants are willing, voluntary, bondservants. We serve Him because we want to serve Him. All that is done in the service of Christ is done because of love and gratitude to Him, freely and voluntarily. And, if ever you are saved, if ever you enter into the Kingdom of God, you must come to Christ yourself, and receive Christ yourself. And His promise is, "*Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.*"

4. The primary thing in this short message is this: — All who receive this King and Kingdom, all who enter into the Church

and Kingdom of God must do so as little children. Let me show you what that means.

## Utter Dependence

A little child is completely and utterly dependent. That is as good and clear a picture of faith in Christ as I can imagine. Saving faith is complete, utter dependence upon Christ; dependence upon Him alone as our Savior (1 Corinthians 1:30-31), dependence upon Him Alone as our Lord (Proverbs 3:5-6), dependence upon Him alone as our Advocate and Intercessor.

## Modesty

A little child is humble, modest, unassuming. He knows that he is just a child. Being just a child, he owns nothing. Faith comes to Christ as absolute Lord and King, giving up all things to Him, willingly acknowledging that all things are His.

Possessing nothing, faith looks to Christ for everything, offering Him nothing. We trust His expiation, not our experience. We trust His mediation, not our morality. We trust His work, not our works. We trust His sanctification, not our sanctity. We trust His Priesthood, not our piety. We trust His sacrifice, not our service.

## Tender Love

A little child is tender and loving. The younger the child, the more this is true. A young child is crushed by a loving father's disapproval, or a loving mother's frown. He loves mom and dad. He craves nothing more than to do for them, honor them, and enjoy their approval and delight.

So it is with God's saints. I am not saying this is the way it is with religious people, or even with very devoted religious people. But this is the way it is with God's people. Believers love Christ

and want to serve and honor him (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 John 4:19).

When my daughter, Faith, was just four or five years old, she did something that illustrates this love-inspired service to Christ. I had been away preaching. As I neared home, I called to tell my wife when I would arrive. As I drove up to the house, I saw that beautiful little girl sitting on the front steps, waiting for her daddy. When I opened the door, before I could get out of my truck, she came running to greet me. As she ran, she pulled her hand from behind her back. She had picked a handful of dandelions for her daddy. As she ran, the wind started to blow. It blew all the fuzzy tops off those weeds. When Faith handed them to me, she started to cry, because her flowers were just ugly stems. I started to cry, too, — because they were the most beautiful flowers I had ever seen. How so? She had picked those dandelions just for me, just because of her love for me, just because she wanted to do something to please me. That made those ugly dandelion weeds, that no one wants, more beautiful to me than any flower on earth. That is just the way God's people serve Him; and that is just the way He receives our wretched attempts at honoring Him for Christ's sake (1 Peter 2:5).

## Sincerity

A little child is an open book, honest, sincere, and without guile. Pretense, hypocrisy, and show are things a little child plays. He doesn't try to live them. Did you ever listen to a little child pray? He does not try to frame his words in impressive sentences, or attempt to show what he knows. The little child simply tells the Lord God what he wants, what he wants to know, and gives thanks.

## Teachable

Children are teachable. They are not just teachable. They are anxious to learn. Little children do not have to be convinced of anything by argument and reason, science and logic. They simply

embrace the things plainly revealed to them. That is why they learn so much so quickly. They never debate the obvious. They do not try to make simple things complex.

When our grandson, Will, was five or six years old, he and his dad were walking around in a store chatting. Doug had been talking to him about God creating all things. As Doug was looking at some doors, Will said, "God made that door." Doug smiled, and began to explain the process of the door being manufactured by men, who got the wood from trees God had made, with the skills God had given them. When his dad finished explaining the details, Will responded, "That's what I said, God made the door." He had learned what his father taught him about God making everything. The detailed explanation was not needed.

## Not Envious

A little child is relatively free of envy and ambition. Those things they learn by observing us. Two children who are friends do not even think about what the other is wearing, how big or little their houses are, what kind of car their parents drive, how much money their parents have in the bank, or what their family heritage is. And they pay no attention to the color of their skin.

## Forgiving

One more thing you cannot help observing about children. They are quick to forgive. God give us grace ever to come to Him, as little children, trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, forgiving as we have been forgiven (Ephesians 4:32-5:2).

"And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when [his] disciples saw [it], they rebuked them. But Jesus called them [unto him], and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as

a little child shall in no wise enter therein.”

# Chapter 108

## “Yet Lackest Thou One Thing”

### Luke 18:18-27

“And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none [is] good, save one, [that is], God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they that heard [it] said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:18-27).

This story of the rich young ruler is reported three times in the four Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were all inspired of God to record the history of the rich man who came to Christ. That fact alone is enough to call our attention to its importance. It tells us that there are lessons in the story that demand special attention. When the Lord Jesus restored Peter, He compelled him to confess his love for Him three times (John 21). When the Lord God would impress upon that same disciple his commission to

preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, He sent him a vision which was repeated three times (Acts 10).

## The Rich Ruler

Here is a man who is anxious about his soul and concerned about eternal life. Such men are rare. He was rich; but he was concerned about his soul. He was young; but he was interested in eternity. He was a ruler among men; but he came to be taught by the Lord Jesus. This rich young ruler comes running up to the Lord Jesus, and says, "*Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" Our Lord knew the man's heart. He knew that this young man was thoroughly familiar with the law of Moses. And He knew that the young man thought, like most people do, that eternal life could be gained by outward morality, that is to say, by obedience to the law. Therefore, He answered this young man according to the law. He told him to keep the commandments. The rich young ruler responded, "*All these have I kept from my youth up.*" Then, the Master said to him, — "*Yet lackest thou one thing.*"

Some who read these lines are, I do not doubt, like this rich young ruler. — "*Yet lackest thou one thing.*" You are very moral. — "*Yet lackest thou one thing.*" You are quite respectable in the eyes of men. — "*Yet lackest thou one thing.*" You believe in God. You believe the Bible to be the Word of God. And it can be said, at least in some sense, that you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. You believe that He is God. You believe in His death, burial, and resurrection as the sinner's Substitute. You even know that Jesus Christ the Lord is the sinner's only hope of salvation before God. Yet, for all that, you know that you are not a child of God, a saved person, and an heir to eternal life. — "*Yet lackest thou one thing.*" Many there are, who are outwardly good, moral, respectable, religious people, who yet lack that one thing which is essential to eternal life.

## The Ruler's Question

*“And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* — This is a question people often ask when they are faced with eternity, when they hear the Gospel preached, when their sin is exposed, and they are terrified with the thought of everlasting hell. We have heard it many times. The Jews, the publicans, and the soldiers, one after another, asked the Savior, *“What shall we do then?”* (Luke 3:10, 12, 14). The men of Judea asked Peter and the disciples, *“What shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37) The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 16:30)

Looking at this question by itself, it appears to be a very noble one, one that we all should ask. We have seen this question many times in the Scriptures. And many who asked it became believers and were saved by the grace of God. They were given eternal life. On the day of Pentecost, a large number of men, after they heard the Gospel message, were pricked in their hearts and cried, *“Men and brethren, What shall we do?”* The Philippian jailer, with a broken and submissive heart, cried, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*

But there was a great difference as this rich young ruler asked this question. His heart was not broken with conviction. His soul was not humbled with a sense of sin. He was proud and self-righteous. He felt that he was sufficient in himself to meet whatever might be required of him. In essence, he was saying to the Lord Jesus, *“You tell me what God requires, and I will do it!”* He had a zeal of righteousness and going about to establish his own righteousness, he had not submitted (and would not submit) himself to the righteousness of God” (Romans 9:31-10:4). How many there are like those Jews described by Paul and like this rich young ruler: very moral, very proud, and very lost!

There is much about this young man that is commendable. He was not a base, profligate rebel. He was moral, religious, and devout. He had been a respectful and obedient son to his parents. If he was married, we may be sure he was a good husband, a good father, and a good provider for his family. He was a

hardworking, honest man, who had acquired much wealth. He was a good neighbor, a respected community leader.

In a day of abounding unbelief, he came to Christ of his own accord. He came not to have some disease healed, not to plead for a helpless child, not to see some great miracle, but out of concern for his immortal soul. He was earnest and sincere. Mark tells us that he came running to Christ. He was orthodox in his creed. He was a highly respected religious leader. He believed in God. He believed the Holy Scriptures. He believed in the reality of eternal life. He was very strict and devout in his practice of religion. Since the days of his youth, he had outwardly kept the law of God. His life was meticulously moral and precise. And he even worshipped Christ. Again, Mark tells us that when he came to Christ, he kneeled down before him. Like Nicodemus, this young man realized that Jesus Christ was a teacher come from God.

He seems even to have acknowledged our Lord's Deity. When the Lord asserted that no man is good, but God only, the young ruler did not withdraw his statement. He seems to have acknowledged that Christ is God.

Yet, this young man demonstrated two very sorrowful characteristics. — Two things about this rich young ruler's character show us that he was a lost, ruined, unregenerate man. *First*, he was ignorant of all spiritual truth. He knew much in a natural sense, but spiritually, regarding spiritual things, he was as ignorant as a man who had never heard of God. He was ignorant of God's holy character. He was ignorant of his own sinfulness. He was ignorant of the law's spiritual nature. He thought that the law only required outward obedience. And he was altogether ignorant of the Gospel of Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9).

And, *second*, this rich young ruler was dreadfully self-righteous. Beware of self-righteousness! No sin is more deadly, and more likely to keep you from Christ than the sin of self-righteousness. And no sin is more common to man.

The Lord Jesus answered this man's question plainly. The man asked what he could do to win God's favor, and Christ told him if you want salvation by human merit, you have got to keep

the law.

“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none *is* good, save one, *that is*, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.” (vv. 19-20)

As far as he understood the law in its outward requirement, he had kept it. He was like Paul, “*as touching the law, blameless.*” — “*And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up*” (v. 21).

But he was not all that he thought he was. He did not in reality keep the commandments at all. The law must be kept perfectly, or it is not kept at all. The law must be kept in all points, or it is not kept at all. The law must be kept at all times, or it is not kept at all. The law must be kept outwardly, or it is not kept at all. The law must be kept inwardly, or it is not kept at all.

God never intended the law to be a means of salvation. Its design is to show man God’s holy character and his own condemnation and guilt. The law condemns, but can never give life. The law demands, but can never give grace (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; 3:10).

“Run,” “do,” and “work,” the law commands,  
But gives me neither feet nor hands.

God requires “*truth in the inward parts;*” but we break the commandments of the law in our hearts and thoughts, even when we do not break them in outward actions (Psalm 51:6; Matthew 5:21-28). To be delivered from blindness regarding ourselves is one of the first things needful to our salvation. The eyes of our understandings must be enlightened by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:18). We must learn to know ourselves. No man who is taught of the Spirit will ever talk of having kept God’s holy law. Those who are taught of God confess with Paul, “*The law is spiritual, but I am carnal.*” “*I know that in me dwells no good thing*” (Romans 7:14-18).

## Yet Lackest Thou

*Second*, the Lord Jesus said to this rich young ruler. — “*Yet lackest thou one thing*” (v. 22). If one of our modern soul-winners could find a young man like this, he would have him under the water, dried off, and in the pulpit in no time. But our Lord was not trying to get another decision to put on his promotional charts as a “soul-winning evangelist.” He labored for the souls of men. He was both compassionate and honest. Therefore, he showed the young man exactly what he lacked. He was not lacking in morality, in religious duty, in orthodoxy, in sincerity, or in zeal. But he was lacking one essential thing. What was that one thing he lacked? What is that one thing we must have if we would inherit eternal life? – Faith in Christ!

The young man boasted that he loved his neighbor as himself, that he honored his parents, that he kept the commandments. Therefore Christ put him to a test. The Lord Jesus said to him, “*Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me*” (v. 22).

Look at this command for a moment. It is a fourfold commandment. Our Lord commanded this young man to surrender to His authority as his Lord. – “*Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor.*” The Lord Jesus commanded the man to trust him. He said, “*Come.*” To come to Christ is to believe Him. It is the exercise of faith in Him. — “*He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*” Mark adds these words: – “*Take up thy cross.*” That is to say, our Lord commanded the man to confess Him. And he commanded this young man to obey Him. He said, “*Follow me.*” These are the things which our Lord requires of all His people: – Submission, Faith, Confession, and Obedience.

The Master had a good reason for giving this command to this particular man. He was probing at the young man’s heart. He wanted to expose his point of rebellion. He was determined to show this young man exactly what he was lacking. This man’s money was his god. That was his point of rebellion. God always

meets the sinner at his point of rebellion. J. C. Ryle's observation on this passage may be alarming; but it is true. We will be wise to heed it.

“We must be willing to part with anything, however dear it may be, if it stands between us and our salvation. We must be ready to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye, to make any sacrifice, and to break any idol. Life, we must remember, eternal life is at stake! One leak neglected, is enough to sink a mighty ship. One besetting sin, obstinately clung to, is enough to shut a soul out of heaven. The love of money, secretly nourished in the heart, is enough to bring a man, in other respects moral and irreproachable, down to the pit of hell.”

Our Lord's command was intended to expose the evil of this young man's heart. It was designed to destroy his self-confidence and pride. It was our Lord's purpose to show the impossibility of salvation by works. This command was designed to show this sinner the necessity of the gospel. By this one, pointed command our Lord stripped away the fig leaves of his self-righteousness, exposed the foolishness of his pride, and showed him his need of the grace of God and his need of a Substitute.

The rich young ruler's one fatal deficiency was a deficiency of the heart. Like Simon Magus, his heart was not right in the sight of God. He was yet unregenerate. He was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. His heart was not broken. His Spirit was not humbled. He would not surrender to Christ as Lord. God met him at his point of rebellion, and he would not bow. He would not come to Christ alone, trusting him alone for salvation. He would not confess Christ as Lord. He would not obey Christ as his Lord. — *“And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.”*

Are you like this young man? Might our Savior's words to him be addressed to you? — *“Yet lackest thou one thing.”* You have one fatal deficiency. Your heart is not right before God. If ever you are saved, your heart must be broken (Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 66:2). And the only way for your heart to be broken is for God to reveal Himself to you and in you in the fulness of his

grace and glory in Christ (Zechariah 12:10). Unless God himself breaks your heart, it will never be broken; and you will never be saved. You must be born again by almighty grace. A new heart must be created within you.

## An Impossible Task

“And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (vv. 24-25).

This is a fact we see confirmed on every side. Our own eyes will tell us that grace and riches seldom go together. — “*Not many mighty, not many noble, are called*” (1 Corinthians 1:26). It is a plain matter of fact that comparatively few rich men are to be found in the way of life. I cannot tell you exactly why that is so; but for one thing, riches incline their possessors to pride, self-will, self-indulgence, and love of the world. For another thing, the rich are seldom dealt with faithfully about their souls. They are generally flattered and fawned over by preachers. — “*The rich hath many friends*” (Proverbs 14:20). Few people have the courage to tell a rich man the whole truth. They are flattered, braggadocioed on, and doted over. The result is that while their hearts are choked with the things of the world, their eyes are blinded to their own condition before God.

We are fools to envy the rich of this world and their possessions. If we had what they have, we would probably be like them, as the stalled ox being fattened for the slaughter. Money, craved, longed for, coveted, and adored is money that keeps myriads of souls out of heaven! “*Those who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare.*” Happy is he who has learned to pray, “*Give me neither poverty nor riches,*” and is really content with such things as he has (1 Timothy 6:9; Proverbs 30:8; Hebrews 13:5).

Many try to make our Master's words mean less than they do; but they mean exactly what they appear to mean. — No more and

no less. — *“How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”*

## Who Then?

When the disciples saw and heard these things, they were astonished, and cried — *“Who then can be saved?”* Our Lord gives us a plain answer to that question. — *“And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God”* (vv. 26-27).

The word of God gives us many striking instances of rich men who were saved. Abraham, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, Josiah, Job, and Daniel were all very great and wealthy men in this world. Yet they were all sinners saved by the grace of God. And what God did for them by His grace, He can do for any, even for you and for me.

With men, any men and all men, salvation is impossible. But, blessed be God, *“The things which are impossible with men are possible with God!”* That means my case is not hopeless. That means your case is not hopeless. It matters not who we are, where we live, what our position in this world is, whether rich or poor, moral or immoral, great or insignificant, *“The things which are impossible with men are possible with God!”* Grace, and not place, is the hinge upon which salvation turns (John 1:12-13; Romans 9:15-16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Psalms 65:4; Psalms 110:3).

If ever the Almighty God puts His hand upon you, you will be saved. *“Who then can be saved?”* I will tell you who can and shall be saved. All who were chosen of God in electing love, all who were redeemed by the blood of Christ, all who are born-again by God the Holy Spirit, all who are called by almighty grace, all who come to Christ in faith can be saved and most assuredly shall be saved.

*“Who then can be saved?”* — If you are not saved, it is not because there is no love in Christ for sinners. It is not because

Christ is not able, willing, and ready to save sinners. If you are not saved, it is because, "*Ye will not come to Christ, that ye might have life.*" It is because "*yet lackest thou one thing.*" It is because you refuse to choose that "*One Thing needful,*" the One Thing you must have, Christ Jesus the Lord (Luke 10:42).

If you do come to Christ, if you choose that "*One Thing needful,*" if you are saved, it will be due entirely to the grace of God. May God give you His grace and cause you to choose "*that good part,*" Christ Jesus. If He will, you will possess Him forever. He is the One thing that "*shall not be taken away*" from you.

# Chapter 109

## A Promise, a Prophecy, and a Problem

### Luke 18:28-34

“Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting. Then he took [unto him] the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge [him], and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken” (Luke 18:28-34).

In Luke 18:18-27 we read about the rich young ruler who came to the Lord Jesus, fell on his knees, and worshipped Him saying, “*Good Mater, What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” You are familiar with the story. The Master said to him, “*Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.*” This rich young ruler looked at all that he had, looked at what Christ required, counted the cost, and said, “No.” He chose to save his life and lost it.

That rich young ruler possessed three things. He possessed them and they possessed him. They are snares by which Satan keeps multitudes from faith in Christ.

1. Religion without Christ. — The rich young ruler was a self-righteous religionist. He was like those who eat and drink unworthily in 1 Corinthians 11. He presumed that he knew God, but did not.

2. The Care of this World. — He was a ruler among men, and had many great cares.

3. The Deceitfulness of Riches. — The young ruler, that lost, self-righteous religious man had great wealth.

When he walked away from the Savior, the Master said, *“How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”* The disciples were astonished. They said, *“Who then can be saved?”* If it is left up to men, it is impossible. But, blessed be His name forever, *“The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.”* *“With God all things are possible.”*

The Lord Jesus had just told the rich young ruler that if he would forsake all and follow Him, he would have treasure in heaven. Peter latched onto that and said to the Savior, *“We’ve done that. We’ve forsaken all and followed you.”* And Matthew tells us he then asked, *“What shall we have therefore.”*

There is nothing in Peter’s question that implied pride, arrogance, ambition, or unbelief. He did not say, “I have forsaken all. What shall I have?” He said, “we.” And the Lord Jesus said nothing to correct him or chastise him. Neither will I. The fact is if I had heard what Peter had just heard, I suspect I would have asked the same thing. In fact, I have asked the same thing. I am very interested in knowing what that treasure is that is laid up for us in heaven. Aren’t you?

## A Promise

Here is the Savior's answer to Peter's question. — "*Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting*" (vv. 29-30).

Our Savior here makes a broad, blessed promise to all who follow Him regarding His all-sufficient, boundless grace. It is not merely a promise about the glory that awaits us, but is primarily about the grace that is ours in this world. Yes, in the world to come we shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away and everlasting blessedness beyond the scope of human imagination. But our Savior here promises us that all who forsake all and follow Him shall "*receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.*" This promise refers distinctly to the life that now is. It is spoken of as "*this present time.*"

We will never suffer loss at the hands of our Master! He promises us "*manifold more*" than we forsake by following Him. Does that mean that we will have greater riches, more property, greater fame, better health, a more tranquil life in this world, as the "health, wealth, prosperity" wolves of today promise? Of course not!

Our Lord's promise obviously has a higher meaning. The "*manifold more*" of the promise refers not to carnal, but to spiritual things. Our Lord Jesus always gives infinitely better than He gets. He here promises us that He will give us, "*in this present time,*" indescribably more than we will ever be obliged to give up for His sake.

Yes, we must lose our lives to save them. We must forsake all, if we would have Christ. But giving up our lives is giving up nothing. The life we get is everything. What we forsake for Christ is nothing. What we get is Christ, who is all! For this Pearl of great price, any man who will not sell all that he has is a fool.

Come, sell all that you have and buy the Pearl of great price,

the Lord Jesus Christ, without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1), and you shall find everything your soul needs in Him. You will have no lack of righteousness, for He is the Lord our Righteousness. You will have no lack of atonement, for the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. You will have no lack of holiness, for Christ is our Sanctification. And you will have no lack of grace, for all grace is ours in Christ. In Christ you will find everything your soul needs. Our Lord's disciples found it so, and we shall, too (Luke 22:35).

*“My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus!”* He will give you, *“in this present time,”* such peace, hope, joy, comfort, and rest in sweet communion with Himself, that you shall never lack anything. The Lord Jesus Christ shall be more to you than money, or property, or relatives, or friends. In our darkest hours He keeps them in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon Him (Isaiah 26:3). He will give you grace to glory in tribulation and take pleasure in reproaches, in infirmities, and in persecutions for His sake (Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 12:10). In your greatest heaviness, He will give you such joy unspeakable and full of glory that you will count it an honor to suffer shame for His name's sake (1 Peter 1:18; Acts 5:41; Romans 8:28; 11:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:25).

Friends have often proved faithless. Great promises have often been broken. Riches have made themselves wings and flown away. But not one of Christ's promises has ever fallen to the ground. Yes, *“my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus!”* — *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”* (Romans 8:32)

In a word, no matter how long *“this present time”* shall last, no matter what woes *“this present time”* shall bring, no matter how dark *“this present time”* shall appear, the Lord God, our great and gracious Savior, promises to all who forsake all and follow Him, *“My grace is sufficient for thee”* (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). There is an infinite, super abounding, overflowing sufficiency in the grace of God to meet all the needs of all His

people forever. No matter who you are, no matter what your needs may be, no matter what circumstances you are in, if you are a believer, if you trust the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord God says to you, *“My grace is sufficient for thee!”* His grace is sufficient to sustain you in your trials (Isaiah 43:1-5), sufficient to uphold you in temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13), sufficient to enable you to perform all His will (1 Thessalonians 5:25). The providence of God will never take you where the grace of God will not keep you. — *“Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it!”* His grace is sufficient to uphold, sustain, provide for, and protect His servants and to make their labors effectual to the souls of men. — *“Our sufficiency is of God!”* And His grace is sufficient even for, no, especially for His fallen saints (Psalm 37:23-25; Mark 16:7).

In your last hour, when you come to the swelling of the Jordan and are about to cross over to the other side, you will yet hear Him say, *“My grace is sufficient for thee!”* When the world is on fire, you will look back over this world and all your life’s experiences and say, *“He hath done all things well.”* In that great day should the Lord Jesus ask, *“Lacked ye anything?”* Our response will be, *“Nothing.”*

Oh, how unsearchable are the riches of Christ *“in this present time.”* — And after this, in the world to come *“life everlasting.”* He gives us grace here, boundless, infinite, free grace, and glory in the world to come!

The Lord Jesus is a gracious Master. His service is sweet. Oh trust the Lord! They who trust Him lack nothing, neither in this world, nor in the world to come! — *“And in the world to come life everlasting!”*

## A Prophecy

In (vv. 31-33) we have before us our Savior’s clear and detailed prophecy concerning His own death as our Substitute. The Lord Jesus, from old eternity, set His face like a flint to go to Calvary and die in our place, bearing our sins in His own body, that He might suffer all the wrath of God to the full satisfaction of justice,

to put away our sins and redeem us from the curse of the law. Now, He says to his disciples, *“Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death: and the third day He shall rise again.”*

It was for this cause that He came into the world (Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 10:5-14). He came here to give His life a ransom for many, to make His soul an offering for sin, and to bear our transgressions in His own body on the tree. He was born in Bethlehem so that He might pour out His life’s blood unto death at Jerusalem.

Let our souls ever be clothed with wonder and amazement before our Savior and His great love for us (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10). Let us ever glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14).

He never swerved from His path for a moment. He was straitened in spirit, until He had finished the work He came to do. (Luke 12:50.) Such love passes knowledge. It is unspeakable — unsearchable! We may rest on that love without fear. If Christ so loved us before we thought of Him, he will surely not cease to love us after we have believed.

Our Savior’s calmness in the prospect of certain death is an example for us. Like Him, let us drink the bitter cup which our Father gives us, without a murmur, and say, *“not my will but thy will be done.”* Believers have no reason to be afraid of death and the grave. Christ died to deliver us from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15; 1 Corinthians 15:56-57). Because He died, we shall never die. Because He arose, we shall arise. Because He lives, we shall forever live.

## A Problem

Here is a very sad, but very common problem among true believers. — *“And they understood none of these things: and this*

*saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken” (v. 34).*

When the Lord Jesus described His coming sufferings and death, as He often did, His disciples didn't understand a thing He said. Its significance was hidden from them. They failed to grasp what He was talking about. We read this with a mixture of pity and surprise. We wonder at the darkness and blindness of the Jews. We marvel that in the face of plain teaching, and in the light of plain types of the Mosaic law the sufferings of Christ were not known. But when we read of the ignorance and unbelief of these disciples, these who truly forsook all and followed Him, these who truly trusted Him, we are amazed. These were saved men, the apostles of our Lord!

What pride, arrogance, and hypocrisy that fact reveals in us. We have greater light than they had. — We have the whole volume of Holy Scripture. We walk no longer, as they did, in the dim light of types, shadows, ceremonies, and carnal ordinances. We have the full sunshine of God's complete Revelation. Yet, we are still terribly ignorant, fearful, and unbelieving.

Why did God the Holy Spirit inspire Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to tell us so much about the ignorance and unbelief, the weaknesses and fears, the falls and failings, and even the denials and abandonments of these faithful men? He did so to teach us that...

1. Were He to leave us to ourselves, we would all soon perish. But, thank God, He will not leave us to ourselves!
2. Our salvation is not dependent upon the strength and quality of our faith, but upon the strength and quality of our Savior.
3. It is not our knowledge that saves us, but Christ.
4. Salvation is altogether the work of God's free grace in Christ.
5. God's saints in this world, as long as we live in this world, are still weak, sinful, failing, and ignorant men. — Nothing more!
6. We must, as long as we are in this weak state, live by faith in Christ. — *“As ye have received Christ Jesus the*

*Lord, so walk ye in him.”*

Yet, it is to us, weak, ignorant, sinful, unbelieving believers that the Lord Jesus Christ made the promise we read in verses 29 and 30. It is to us that he says, — *“Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.”*

# Chapter 110

## Jesus at a Stand

### Luke 18:35-43

“And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, [thou] Son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, [Thou] Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw [it], gave praise unto God” (Luke 18:35-43).

We read in the tenth chapter of Joshua how that he by whom the walls of Jericho fell, commanded the sun to stand still in the midst of heaven. At the command of a man “*the sun stood still!*” We are told, “*There was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man*” (Josh. 10:14). But here we have something even more remarkable than that. Here we see the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, at a stand. He was stopped dead in His tracks by the cry of a needy sinner for mercy. It is one thing to cause the sun to stand still; but we have before us in this passage a man who caused the God who made the sun to stand still!

As He was coming near Jericho on His way to Jerusalem to redeem His people, our Lord Jesus heard a poor, blind beggar crying for mercy. At the sound of his cry, we are told, “*Jesus stood!*” What a wonderful, amazing picture we have before us! Here is the omnipotent God stopped in His tracks, held fast by the cry of a needy soul for His mercy.

He was on His way to Jerusalem to accomplish the redemption of His people, to fulfill the will of God. Nothing could stop Him. Nothing could cause Him to pause. Nothing could detour Him from his work. But one, solitary, helpless soul, one blind beggar crying for mercy, looking to Him for help, believing Him, crying to Him stopped the Son of God in His tracks — “*Jesus stood!*”

Surely, the place whereon we stand is holy ground. Let us put off our shoes of idle curiosity and theological speculation, and turn aside for a little while from such trifles to see this great sight. Surely, there are lessons to be learned here that are of more value than gold.

The one thing that shines forth from this event in our Savior’s earthly life and ministry is this: The Son of God will never ignore the cry or refuse the faith of a sinner seeking mercy, because He “*delighteth in mercy!*”

## Witnesses Believed

Here is a man who believed the testimony he heard from other men about the Lord Jesus in a day when few did. He believed the report of men who told what they knew about the Son of God. There were great multitudes who followed the Lord Jesus as He walked along and taught the people. Some followed Him for loaves and some for love. — Some out of curiosity and some out of conviction. — Some for greed and some for grace. But there were few, very few who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Many, many who saw His miracles yet believed Him not. But here is a blind man, a man who never saw any of our Lord’s miracles. He knew the Master only by hearsay, by the testimony of others. Yet, he believed Him, and believed Him the first time he heard about

Him!

This man simply heard other men and women talking about the Savior (vv. 35-38). Blessed gossip is that gossip that is all about Christ! I wonder what this man heard the crowd saying. Perhaps he heard how the Master had healed others, even “*as many as had need of healing*” (Luke 9:11). Without question, he had heard who this man is. He called the Savior “*Jesus,*” the “*Son of David,*” and owned Him as his “*Lord.*” He acknowledged that Christ is Lord, the One whose prerogative alone it is to give mercy (v. 41). He heard about the Savior’s many mighty miracles of mercy. And he heard that “*Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.*” He knew that the Son of God might never pass his way again!

His simple, confident, immediate faith in Christ causes me to blush. I have books of apologetics, an excellent library of theological works, and numerous good biographies of faithful men, and have read them for over forty years. Yet, how little I know of this childlike confidence and faith in Christ! Even among true believers, simple, confident, unhesitating faith is seldom found where we most reasonably expect it (Luke 18:34). The humble, broken, contrite, and needy soul believes God and walks in peace. The learned, well-read theologian is often harassed with doubts and questions.

## Means Used

If we hope for mercy, we must avail ourselves of every means of good to our souls. I cannot adequately stress the importance of diligence in using the means God gives us. We are told there was “*a certain blind man who sat by the wayside begging.*” He sought the place where his pitiful condition was most likely to attract attention. He did not sit lazily at home, and wait for relief to come to him. He placed himself by the road-side, so that any who could and would help him might see him and give him help. There, sitting by the wayside, he heard that “*Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.*” Immediately, he began to cry to the Savior for mercy. — “*Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!*” Had he not been where he was, when he was, as the Lord Jesus passed

that way, he would not have obtained what he needed.

If you care for your soul, if you desire God's salvation, remember this blind man. Diligently use the means of grace God has afforded you. Make it your business to be found in the place where the Lord Jesus has promised to be present, in His house, where His saints gather to worship Him and hear His Word (Matthew 18:20). Make it your business to sit by the wayside, where the Word of God is read and the Gospel of Christ is preached, where God's people assemble together in public worship.

If you expect God to speak to you and give you His grace, if you expect to hear from heaven while you despise the means He has set before you, because you are too lazy to attend His worship, you are crassly presumptuous.

How many there are who get excited about their religious chat rooms on the Internet, or the latest bundle of tapes in the mail, or the preacher on television, and use these things as a substitute for worshipping God in His house, supporting a faithful assembly, and serving the cause of Christ. Such activity may soothe the conscience, but it soothes by searing. I know many who run off to every sovereign grace Bible conference possible, and attend the preaching of a visiting preacher whom they highly esteem, who refuse to hear the pastor God has set in their community and devote themselves to the cause of Christ through the Gospel church where they are. All such religious hypocrites are like the Pharisee in Luke 18:11. Your religion is nothing but a deceitful game that will soon carry you to hell.

It is true that "*God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.*" But it is no less true that He ordinarily has mercy on those who use the means He puts before them. I know very few people who were converted outside the house of God. It is true that Christ is found of those who seek him not. But it is also true that He is always found of those who truly seek Him (Jeremiah 29:11-14). Those who despise the worship of God and the preaching of the Gospel, the fellowship of God's saints and the praises of His people in Zion despise their own mercies and dig graves for their own souls.

This blind man was in the place where help was most likely to be obtained. I know that God is sovereign. I know that salvation is of the Lord. I know that every chosen, redeemed sinner shall be saved. I am fully aware of those facts and rejoice in them. Yet, I know that every man is responsible for his own soul. I know that we are responsible to use the means of grace God gives us. When this poor, blind man heard that "*Jesus of Nazareth passeth by,*" he was found "*sitting by the wayside.*"

What wisdom he displayed! He took up a hopeful position "*by the wayside.*" There he would be likely to hear any good news that may be spread. There he was most likely to meet with and be seen by the compassionate. Though he was blind, he was not deaf. And he used what he had for good.

Do not forsake the house of God (Hebrews 10:25). Do not forsake the reading of Holy Scripture (2 Timothy 3:15). Do not forsake private prayer. These are God's ordained means of grace. To despise them is to despise His grace. To neglect them is to neglect His grace. To use them is to be in the path of mercy (Matthew 18:20).

## Blessed Violence

We also have before us a picture of the blessed violence of faith. We learn once more, by the example of this poor blind man, that as "*the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence,*" so "*the violent take it by force*" (Matthew 11:12).

We are told that when this blind man heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he "*cried, saying, Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*" We are also told that when some rebuked him and told him to hold his peace, he would not be silenced. — "*But he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.*" He had a felt, desperate need. His need taught him how to pray, and gave him words to speak, and pressed upon him the urgent necessity for help. He was not about to be stopped by the rebukes of people who knew nothing of his misery. Let them think and say what they might, he was determined to have mercy, if the Lord Jesus was willing to give

it. His sense of wretchedness made him go on crying. And his importunity was rewarded with grace bestowed. He found what he sought. That very day he received his sight.

Are you a poor, blind sinner, without faith, without Christ, without life? Your need is far greater than this man's. The blindness of the heart is far more grievous than the blindness of the eye. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, is still passing by (Romans 10:6-13). Cry to him for mercy. Let nothing stop your crying.

Why will you die, when life is to be had freely? Why will you perish under the wrath of God, when He "*delighteth in mercy*"? Why will you rush headlong to hell, when the Door is open in heaven, and God himself bids you, "*Come up hither*"? Why will you go on carrying the guilt of sin, when the Lord God is a God who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin? Will you die for thirst, with the Water of Life before you? Will you perish for want of bread, with the Bread of Life on the table? Will you be forever lost? If so, there is but one reason. The Son of God declares it to be this: — "*Ye will not come to me that ye might have life!*" Oh, may God be pleased to save you from yourself, for Christ's sake!

## Christ's Compassion

We see here how compassionate our all-glorious, ever-gracious Christ, the Son of God, is to needy sinners! His compassion is seen in what He did for the man. *First*, He caused the man to have a need that would put him in this place when He passed by. His blindness was a blessed blindness. It was blindness that worked by Divine arrangement for his eternal salvation. *Second*, the Savior sent someone to tell this man about Him. *Third*, He passed by where the man was.

"*And Jesus stood*" (vv. 40-42). — He came to where the man was, heard his cry, and stood as if to say, "I will wait here to be gracious. I will not make another move until I have bestowed mercy upon this needy soul." He called the blind man. The Savior commanded that he be brought to Him (Psalm 110:3). He

spoke grace to him, effectual, omnipotent, healing grace! — *“Immediately, he received his sight.”*

He was honored by this man’s faith, and He honored faith with His salvation. — *“Thy faith hath saved thee!”* Then He went up to Jerusalem and redeemed him.

We are told that when the blind man continued crying for mercy, our Lord stood and commanded him to be brought unto Him. He was going up to Jerusalem to die, and had weighty matters on his mind; but He found time to stop to speak kindly to this poor sufferer. Then Jesus asked the man, “What do you want me to do for you?” “Lord,” he pleaded, “I want to see!” At once, we are told, *“Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee.”* His faith may have been weak and mixed with much ignorance. But it had made him cry to the Lord Jesus, and go on crying in spite of rebukes, until the Master answered him. Christ came to him on purpose with grace. He came to Christ on purpose with faith. And the Lord Jesus did not cast him out. He gave him the desire of his heart. Immediately he received sight.

Passages like these are intended specifically to encourage needy sinners to come to Christ. You may be sensible of much infirmity. Your faith may be very feeble. Your sins may be very many and very great. Your prayers may be very poor and stammering. Your motives may be far short of perfection. But if you come to Christ with your sins, if you are willing to forsake all other confidence, and commit your soul to the Christ of God, His word to you is this. — *“All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out”* (John 6:37). I want you to see and be assured of this fact. Faith always gets what it seeks. — mercy! — *“And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.”*

## Loving Obedience

Now, let me show you one more thing. Read verse 43, and learn this. Nothing inspires obedience to Christ like gratitude and love. — *“And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise*

*unto God.”*

When the blind man was given his sight, when he was saved by Christ, he followed the Lord Jesus, glorifying God. His gratitude was deeply felt. His love was spontaneous. And his following of Christ was spontaneous. Pharisees caviled at our Lord. Sadducees sneered at His doctrine. Brilliant lawyers derided Him as a base antinomian. None of that mattered to this new born soul. He had the witness in himself that Christ is a Master worth following. He could say, “*I was blind, and now I see*” (John 9:25). He was a poor, blind, lost, dead sinner when he left home that morning. He went home saved, rich, full of light, a child of God. Nothing else mattered.

Grace experienced is the source of true obedience. Gratitude is the source of godliness. Love is the rule of devotion. No one will ever take up the cross and confess Christ, not really, who does not feel in the depths of his soul that he is head over heels a debtor to His magnificent, matchless mercy and sovereign, saving grace. We love Him who first loved us and washed away our sins with His own precious blood. Christ has redeemed me. He has healed me. He has saved me. I belong to him. What could be more reasonable?

May God be pleased, for Christ’s sake, to give us grace that we may like this man follow the Lord Jesus, glorifying God all the days of our lives.

# Chapter 111

## A Lost Sinner Sought and Saved

### Luke 19:1-10

“And [Jesus] entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, [there was] a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that [way]. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw [it], they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore [him] fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:1-10).

It is always profitable for our souls to read about the conversion of a sinner by God’s omnipotent grace. It is especially profitable to read and study the stories of God’s converting grace given to us in the pages of Holy Scripture. We should read them often and study them with care, asking God the Holy Spirit to teach us the wonders of His grace. When we read about the conversion of the Samaritan woman in John 4, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus in

Acts 9, and the conversion of Onesimus in the Book of Philemon, we find our hearts saying, “That is what the Lord has done for me.” Don’t we?

In Luke 19:1-10 we read the story of Zacchaeus’ conversion by the Lord Jesus. The key to understanding this story of God’s marvelous, free, saving grace is found in verses 9 and 10. Our Savior tells us that salvation came to Zacchaeus because “*he also is a son of Abraham.*” He was saved by omnipotent grace because the Lord Jesus came down here “*to seek and to save that which was lost.*” And our blessed Savior never changes. What He did for Zacchaeus, He still does for sinners today.

## Context

As we read this story, we should read it in its context. Look back to Luke 18. In verses 18-25 we read about the rich young ruler, who refused to bow to Christ. As he walked away from the Master, we read in verses 24-26: — “*And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*” Then, in verse 26 the disciples asked, “*Who then can be saved?*”

Then, our Savior said in verse 27, “*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.*” Beginning right there, He proceeds to demonstrate the fact that He is that God with whom alone salvation is possible. He and He alone is able to save unto the uttermost all who come to God by Him, for He is Himself God the Son, God who came to seek and to save that which was lost. In verse 30 He tells us that the salvation He brings is “*in the world to come life everlasting.*” In verses 31-33 He tells us how this salvation, this life everlasting comes to our poor souls by His death upon the cursed tree as the sinner’s Substitute. In verses 35-43, giving sight and salvation to the blind man as He approached Jericho, He shows us that the sure result of His finished work of redemption is the salvation of sinners by omnipotent grace.

## Solemn Words

This chapter opens with some very solemn words given by God the Holy Spirit, words we must not pass over lightly. — “*And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.*” The Lord Jesus entered into Jericho, and passed through it. As He was approaching Jericho, He saved Bartimaeus (Mark 10:40-52) and the blind man we read about in chapter 18. As He was going out of Jericho, He saved two blind men sitting by the wayside (Matthew 20:29-34). A short distance further out of Jericho, He saved Zacchaeus.

But we read of no wonders of grace performed in Jericho. Rather, here we read, “*And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.*” Back in the days of Joshua, hundreds of years before, the Lord Jesus found a precious jewel for His crown there in a harlot named Rahab (Joshua 2 and 6; Hebrews 11:31). Indeed, He found many jewels for His crown there over the years (1 Kings 16:34). But now He passes through Jericho. It appears that there were none within the walls of that great city He had come to save. Now He finds jewels for His crown among the poor, the blind, the publicans, and sinners, who were the castaways of Jericho.

With these words in verse 1, Luke seems to be saying to us, “Never cease to adore and give thanks to God our Savior for His sovereign, distinguishing grace!” He who has mercy on whom He will have mercy, has not left us to ourselves! Let us rejoice and worship Him (Psalm 116:12-13, 17).

The spiritual lessons in this passage (Luke 19:1-10) are many. Let me direct your attention to just a few of them.

### Grace Omnipotent

*First*, Zacchaeus’ conversion tells us that the grace of God that brings salvation is omnipotent and irresistible. None are too sinful, too base, too vile, or too far gone for Christ to save. His

arm is not shortened that He cannot save. Oh, no! His mighty arm is omnipotent in the operations of His grace! None are beyond the reach of omnipotent mercy!

Here is a notorious publican, one of the most well known of the despised tax-collectors dwelling near Jericho, transformed into a child of God. Here is a rich man made to pass through the needle's eye into the kingdom of God. Here is a covetous man transformed instantaneously into a self-sacrificing philanthropist! Our all-glorious, ever-gracious Christ is able to save to the uttermost! Here is a Physician before whom none are incurable! Yes, "*all things are possible with God;*" and Jesus Christ is God our Savior! He still breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the captive free. He still makes the lame to walk again and causes the blind to see!

Hear Him, ye deaf! His praise, ye dumb!  
Your loosened tongues employ!  
Ye blind behold you Savior come;  
And leap ye lame for joy!

## Small Things

The *second* thing I see in this story of Zacchaeus' conversion is the fact that our great God uses even the smallest, most insignificant things to save His own elect. Great works often turn on small things. Let us despise none (Zechariah 4:10).

And, behold, *there was* a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. (Luke 19:2-3)

It was curiosity, nothing but curiosity on his part that brought Zacchaeus to the place ordained of God from eternity to be the place where Christ would find him. His curiosity and that alone seems to have inspired him, a grown man, to scamper up a sycamore tree like a little boy (v. 4). But...

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform!

Zacchaeus was curious; but Christ had come to be gracious. It was Christ who was secretly working to accomplish His purpose of grace toward Zacchaeus. His curiosity was but a part of our Lord's secret work by which He would perform His gracious work.

## **Sovereign Election**

Here is a *third* thing made clear in this passage. Salvation comes to chosen sinners because the purpose of God according to election is sure. As I told you before, Salvation came to Zacchaeus because Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham.

He may or may not have been a Jew outwardly. We are not told. Many of the publicans were Jews. Others were Gentiles. But this publican was a child of promise (Galatians 4:28), one of Christ's, an heir of promise, because he was numbered among Abraham's spiritual seed (Galatians 3:29). He was by nature a coarse, wicked man (Matthew 18:17). Like you and me, he was a sinner by birth, a sinner by nature, a sinner by choice, and a sinner by practice. But he was distinguished from all others in the crowd that day by God's distinguishing grace and called, because God had from the beginning chosen him to salvation.

## **Prevenient Grace**

*Fourth*, we have before us in the conversion of Zacchaeus another display of God's marvelous prevenient grace. Yes, Zacchaeus sought to see Jesus, who He was. He was curious to see the man about whom so much commotion was made. But Zacchaeus was not the one who caused the commotion or the curiosity it aroused. That was Christ Himself. He sought to see Zacchaeus long before Zacchaeus thought about seeking to see him. Our Savior purposefully directed His steps through Jericho, because the hour had come for Him to call Zacchaeus. This was the day appointed from all eternity for salvation to come to Zacchaeus' house! All the steps leading to that purposed end were marked out, over-ruled, and made to serve this one great end.

Oh, how precious is the realization of God's prevenient grace when it is revealed to us by His Spirit! That which the world cannot see, the Spirit taught soul sees as a huge volume read by his enlightened eyes, telling the story of God's secret operations of grace just for him. The many wondrous works of God's prevenient grace performed for us were those things that ultimately brought us to Christ and Christ to us. As Jude puts it, we were sanctified by God the Father, preserved in Jesus Christ, and called. Therefore, mercy, peace, and love have been multiplied to us all the days of our lives, though we knew nothing about it until we were called (Jude 1-2). Goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our lives, chasing us to the appointed place of love, at the appointed time of love. And that same goodness and mercy will continue to follow us all the days of our lives, until goodness and mercy have chased us right into glory!

Look back, O my soul, look back over the days of your life and see how preserving grace in Christ kept you until that same grace called you to Christ, and all this from the sanctification of God the Father in His eternal purpose concerning you (Ephesians 1:3-6; Romans 8:28-30; 11:33-36).

The sweet hounds of heaven, "Goodness" and "Mercy," get Zacchaeus treed. Then the Son of God comes to the spot, beholds him who, though he went to see Christ, never once thought that Christ would see him. There the Lord calls to him, calls him by name, bids him come down, invites Himself to his house, tells him that He must today abide with him at his house; and Zacchaeus finds his heart instantly disposed to come down from the tree, and to receive Christ joyfully. Why? Because it is written, "*Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple...Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.*" (Psalms 65:4; 110:3)

When poor sinners, like this publican, feel a desire to see Christ, to hear his Word as He passes by, though they may be

completely unaware of it, it may be that it is their Savior working upon their minds creating the desire in them, predisposing them to hear His voice in the call of the Gospel. Though they are, like Zacchaeus, “*of little stature,*” little in knowledge, little in the apprehension of their sins, and even little in desire for Christ, yet, neither the press of the world, the press of time, or the press of a multitude, can keep them from Christ, when the time of love has come.

When, by some event of providence, a sinner is caused to be in the place where Christ comes in saving power, though he may have come with the most base motives imaginable, if the sinner is one of God’s elect and the time of love has come for him, he will then and there hear the Shepherd’s voice and follow Him.

Child of God, roll these things over in your heart day by day. Never lose sight of them. The Son of God had His eye upon you from eternity, just as He had his eye upon Zacchaeus. You were chosen by Him in everlasting love (Ephesians 1:3-4). Your name was written in the Book of Life before the worlds were made (Revelation 13:8; Luke 10:20). You were one of those sheep given to the Good Shepherd by the Father from old eternity (John 10:27-29). And it is written, “*The flocks shall pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the Lord*” (Jeremiah 33:13). He said, “*I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant*” (Ezekiel 20:37). And so it came to pass!

### **Irresistible Grace**

Look at verses 5 and 6. Zacchaeus was in this place at this time because the Lord planted that sycamore tree just outside Jericho for him and sent him up that tree, because He was coming there to save him. Because the Lord wanted his conversion to be, as it were, a public spectacle, He made Zacchaeus a little man and the limbs of the tree low enough for him to get hold of them. — “*And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house*” (v. 5).

And you know what, Zacchaeus did. — “*And he made haste,*

*and came down, and received him joyfully”* (v. 6). He did so because God’s omnipotent, saving grace is irresistible. He who said, “*To day I must abide at thy house,*” must do so.

If any sinner comes to Christ, and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ unto life everlasting, he does so because God has drawn him to Christ by the effectual power and irresistible grace of His Spirit. True faith is the result of, not the cause of, Divine grace. Saving faith is created in a person’s heart by the mighty, sovereign operations of God the Holy Spirit in omnipotent, saving grace (Ephesians 1:19; Colossians 2:12).

This creation of faith in the heart, by which a person is drawn to Christ, is what we call “effectual calling” or “irresistible grace.” The effectual calling of the Holy Spirit is that sovereign, gracious, irresistible work and operation of God the Holy Spirit, which changes a man’s heart and will, causing him to come to Christ and be saved.

Effectual calling is the tender influence, overpowering love, compelling grace, and irresistible power of God the Holy Ghost, which causes chosen, redeemed sinners to gladly and willingly receive Christ as Lord and Savior. Those who by nature, if left to themselves, would not come to Christ, are made willing to come to Him in effectual calling.

### **A Mighty Change**

Read verses 7 and 8, and you will see that grace wrought in a sinner makes a mighty change in the sinner who experiences it.

“And when they saw *it*, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore *him* fourfold.

Without any word of command, without any threat of law, without any promise of reward, Zacchaeus did what the rich young ruler, who claimed to live by the law, could never do. — He sold everything he had for the Pearl of Great price, took up his cross, and followed the Savior joyfully, with a willing heart,

because he wanted to. What was the difference between the two men? — God’s distinguishing grace! That’s all. The Lord Jesus did something for Zacchaeus. The rich young ruler came to Jesus. But here we see Jesus coming to Zacchaeus. — What a difference! And that is exactly how the Savior explains the difference. — *“And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost”* (vv. 9-10).

These 10 verses of Holy Scripture give us the inspired spiritual biography of every one of Christ’s redeemed ones. This is my testimony. And, if you know Him, this is your testimony, too.

Our blessed Savior has from everlasting arranged every step for the accomplishment of His great purpose of grace for His own. When the hour is come for the calling of His chosen to the knowledge and enjoyment of Himself and of all God’s boundless, free grace in Him, He brings His own to the appointed place and meets them with omnipotent grace. Everything in providence is so ordered and disposed of by His prevenient grace that not one thing can fail.

How refreshing! How blessed! During all the days and years of our rebellion, sin, and unbelief, the Savior’s eye unceasingly watched over us. And when the love-calls of His Holy Spirit went forth, though, like Zacchaeus, we were lifted up with Pharisaical pride, self-righteousness, ambition, worldly pursuits, and the countless other vanities that had kept us from Christ, down we came at the call of grace! Gladly, we took the Savior home to our house and to our heart, and received Him joyfully. Why? Because the Son of Man came at the time of love to seek and to save that which was lost!

Do you know any thing of the love-calls of our omnipotent Savior? It is impossible not to know them, if you have ever heard them. The soul that hears the voice of the Son of God, though he never heard it before, knows the sweet sound of the Shepherd’s voice. When the Savior speaks to a sinner dead in trespasses and sins, he speaks with...

1. A Loud Voice that Cannot be Ignored (John 11:43).
2. A Powerful Voice that Cannot be Resisted (John 11:44; Psalm 29:3-11).
3. A Still Small Voice that None can Hear except the One Called (1 Kings 19:9-14).
4. A Sweet, Loving, Winning Voice that Opens the Heart (Song of Solomon 5:2).
5. And A Personal Voice that is Known by the One Called (Luke 19:5).

# Chapter 112

## The Nobleman and His Servants

Luke 19:11-27

“And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this [man] to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, [here is] thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou laydst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, [thou] wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou

my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give [it] to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay [them] before me” (Luke 19:11-27).

When our Master had saved Zacchaeus, though the disciples heard His doctrine and saw the way He dealt with that poor soul in grace, though the Lord Jesus had told them plainly that He was on His way to Jerusalem to die in their place, to redeem His people by the shedding of His blood, they still thought they were on their way to His inauguration ball as the King of Israel! The parable given in verses 12-27 was given to correct their ignorance, “*because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.*”

Their minds were fixed on the notion that the coming of Christ the King meant that He was about to become a carnal king, a king over the physical nation of Israel. They had terribly carnal notions about His kingdom. So He here showed them that, for the present, the practical matter to be remembered was that He had come “*to seek and to save that which was lost.*”

If they had not been so full of their idle dreams of a temporal, earthly kingdom, they would have understood that in the calling of Zacchaeus, the Lord Jesus had manifested His Kingship in the realm of mercy and grace and salvation. He had in seeking and saving Zacchaeus displayed the sovereignty of His grace as the sovereign King of grace. That is what He is doing today on His throne as our great King, the Son of God and the Son of Man, the Son of David and David’s Lord. He is seeking and saving his lost ones.

This parable is an illustration, a picture of things present and things to come, which ought to set our hearts upon our Savior and his cause in this world. Its intent is to show us our faithful God

and Savior, who has promised, “*Him that honoureth me I will honor,*” will reward His faithful servants for their service, not in this world, but in the world to come.

## The Nobleman

“*He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return*” (v. 12). — I am sure that you understand who the nobleman in this parable represents. He represents our Lord Jesus Himself. He was here on earth a man among men, and truly a nobleman in the midst of His fellow citizens. He was and is King of all the earth. He is King by nature and by right, but He must first go away by death, resurrection, and ascension, to the highest courts of heaven to receive for Himself a kingdom from His Father as the reward of His obedience. It is written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Psalm, “*Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance.*” The day is coming when He will return, clothed with glory and honor, to take unto Himself His great power and reign; for He must reign till all enemies are put under His feet. When He comes, His enemies will be destroyed, and His faithful servants will be abundantly rewarded. That is the essence of the parable’s meaning.

The Son of God came here in humiliation as the Son of Man “*to seek and to save that which was lost.*” He is here portrayed as having finished His work of redemption and returned to glory to receive his kingdom. He ascended back to heaven to receive the kingdom for us as our Forerunner (Hebrews 6:20), and to receive all His ransomed ones into His kingdom by the mighty operations of His Holy Spirit. He is still the Son of Man, now ascended to Glory and seated upon His throne; and it is still His business “*to seek and to save that which was lost.*” After He has received His kingdom, after He has saved all His lost ones, He will return to judge the world. Even then, it shall be His business “*to seek and to save that which was lost.*”

When the Lord Jesus left this world, He ascended up into heaven as a mighty conqueror, leading captivity captive. He is

there sitting at the right hand of God, doing the work of a High Priest for His people, ever making intercession for them. But He will not sit there always. He will come forth from the holy of holies to bless His people. He will come again with power and glory to put down every enemy under His feet, and to set up His universal kingdom in a new heavens and a new earth (Hebrews 2:8-9). When Christ returns, the kingdoms of the world shall become His.

Let these things sink down into our hearts and minds. In all our thoughts about Christ let us never forget His glorious second advent. He who lived for us, and died for us, and rose again for us, and intercedes for us is coming again in power and great glory (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Peter 3:11-14).

## Christ's Servants

*“And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us”* (vv. 13-14). — Our Lord compares His servants to men who have been left in charge of their master’s money, with strict instructions to use that money well. They are to occupy until he comes again. To each of these ten servants he gave a pound of money. But who are these servants? Though ten servants are mentioned, there are but two groups, or categories. All ten are the Nobleman’s servants; but some were faithful and good, the others were slothful and useless.

Each servant was given a pound, which appears to me to represent the Gospel of the grace of God. Oh, what a choice blessing that is! All who are given the great privilege of hearing the Gospel of the grace of God have the same charge. — *“Occupy till I come.”* The words mean, “Take this pound that I have put in your hands and busy yourself in trade with it until I return.”

What does that mean? It means that we to whom the Lord God has given this great treasure are responsible to trade with it for the increase of riches to our souls, responsible to believe it to

the saving of our souls. This is exactly what Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:18-6:1.

“And all things [are] of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech [you] by us: we pray [you] in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him [to be] sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. We then, [as] workers together [with him], beseech [you] also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”

It is true that we cannot and will not trade, without money and without price, for the Pearl of Great Price until and unless God the Holy Spirit gives us grace to do so. But that is our charge, our responsibility before God. Taking the pound the Lord has given us, believing the Gospel, our souls are enriched with grace, enriched with the sweet experience of grace, some fivefold and some tenfold. And in the world to come we shall be enriched by His grace to an infinitely higher degree than can ever be imagined by us in this body of flesh (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

The countless privileges which we enjoy, compared to those who have never heard the Gospel, are “*pounds*” given to us by Christ, “*pounds*” for which we must one day give account. In the Judgment Day we will not stand side by side with the tribesmen of heathen lands who never heard of the Bible, the God of Glory, and the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. We have much more for which we shall give account in that great day.

The faithful servants in this parable represent those who believe the Gospel, using the means God has given us for the benefit of our souls. These faithful servants rejoice in the prospect of the Lord’s coming. By the grace of God, we shall be found looking for Him when He comes again, living in hope of eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

The unprofitable servant has his pound. He, too, hears the Gospel of grace and salvation, redemption and righteousness in and by Christ. But the unprofitable servant hates his Master, the Lord Jesus. He hates God's method of saving sinners by free and sovereign grace through Christ, the sinner's crucified Substitute, and rejects the counsel of God against his own soul.

Both the faithful servants and the unprofitable servant differ from the world in general. They differ in this one thing. — You and I have been given the Gospel. We have been called by the Gospel. The world at large has not. To whom much is given, much shall be required. — What a great benefit! — What a great weight of responsibility!

The unbelief and rejection of the unprofitable servant is the cause of his just condemnation (Proverbs 1:23-33). The faith of the profitable servant, believing the Gospel, trusting Christ, magnifies the riches of God's free grace in us and assures us of greater riches in the world to come.

## Blessed Servitude

All ten of these servants were the nobleman's servants, both the faithful and the unprofitable. Believers and unbelievers alike are Christ's servants. Those who hate Him and refuse to bow to Him are His servants, just as surely as Gabriel himself. And we who believe Him and rejoice in His rule are His servants. But all are His servants. But we who believe Him, we who are glad to be His servants are "*occupying*," using the Gospel for our souls' everlasting benefit.

Let me show you something about the blessedness of our service. It is a blessed servitude indeed! Our service is most honorable. We serve a great Nobleman, the King of Glory! Ours is a service for which our Master supplies all — "*a pound*." All that we need to know Christ and enrich our souls by Christ is found in the Gospel. And our service is itself exactly that which we need. — Faith in Christ. The essence of our service is faith in Christ, worshipping the Son of God (John 6:27-29). What blessed service this is! To occupy till He comes, to make trade with the

Gospel, is neither more nor less than believing Him. The more we believe Him, the more our souls are enriched by Him. The more we believe Him, the more we grow in the grace and knowledge of God our Savior.

## Reckoning Day

There is a day coming in which we will give an account of our service. In that great day of reckoning we will be judged by the Gospel, by what we have done with the “*pound*” our Savior has given us.

“And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds” (vv. 15-16).

The faithful servant, with proper humility, puts himself in the background. It is not he who has “*gained ten pounds,*” but his Lord’s pound that has done it. He is pleased to bring the ten pounds; yet he claims no credit for himself, but says, “*Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.*”

“And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities” (vv. 17-19).

Notice that there is no correlation between the servant’s work and the reward for it. He who gained ten pounds in this world by the faith God gave him by the Gospel, and he who gained but two, are both declared to be faithful servants and rewarded as such.

“And another came, saying, Lord, behold, *here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not*

sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, *thou* wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?" (vv. 20-23).

## The Servants Rewarded

“And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give *it* to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay *them* before me” (vv. 24-27).

Those who will not have this Man to rule over them, those who are His enemies, when He comes again, He will take from them everything they have and give it to His own. Then, he will have them brought before Him and slain.

Do you remember our Lord’s answer to Peter, when Peter asked him what we shall have who have left all and followed him (Luke 18:28-30)? The Lord Jesus said, “*In the world to come life everlasting!*” That is the reward the Lord Jesus gives to all who trust Him. He will say, “*Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord*” (Matthew 25:21).

God’s saints receive great recompense even in this present time. Though our names are often cast out as evil, though we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God, the gain of godliness, of faith in Christ, is not to be measured in earthly things, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, in a good hope through grace and joy in believing. Still, our good things are not in this world. But there is a day coming when we shall have an abundant recompense! We shall,

in that day, receive wages far exceeding anything we have imagined. — *“In the world to come life everlasting!”*

“We read of a place that’s called heaven.  
It’s made for the pure and the free.  
These truths in God’s Word He hath given. —  
How beautiful heaven must be!

In heaven no drooping nor pining,  
No wishing for elsewhere to be.  
God’s light is forever there shining —  
How beautiful heaven must be!

Pure waters of life there are flowing;  
And all who will drink may be free.  
Rare jewels of splendor are glowing —  
How beautiful heaven must be!

The angels so sweetly are singing  
Up there by the beautiful sea.  
Sweet chords from their gold harps are ringing. —  
How beautiful heaven must be!

How beautiful heaven must be!  
Sweet home of the happy and free,  
Fair haven of rest for the weary,  
How beautiful heaven must be!”

# Chapter 113

## King Jesus Riding the Wild Ass's Colt

Luke 19:28-40

“And when he had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, when he was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount called [the mount] of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, Saying, Go ye into the village over against [you]; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring [him hither]. And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose [him]? thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him. And they that were sent went their way, and found even as he had said unto them. And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, Why loose ye the colt? And they said, The Lord hath need of him. And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon. And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way. And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed [be] the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would

immediately cry out” (Luke 19:28-40).

I love the way Luke tells us that the Lord Jesus “*went before*” (v. 28) His disciples. Don’t you? In all things He goes before us, leading the way. He never sends where He has not been and does not lead. If He leads you down a winding road into a deep, dark valley, He goes before you. If He leads you into the wilderness of temptation, He goes before you. And when He brings you up to heaven, “*ascending up to Jerusalem*” above, He has gone before you, to prepare a place for you.

Here Luke tells us that the Savior is “*ascending*,” purposefully, confidently, determinately “*up to Jerusalem*” as our great King, ascending to conquer death, hell, and the grave for us, ascending to His throne in Glory as our King. This event in the earthly life and ministry of our Savior is one of just a few that are recorded in detail by Matthew (21:1-11), Mark (11:1-11), Luke, and John (12:12-19). It is the only event in our Savior’s earthly life and ministry that he seems to have deliberately made a matter of great, public display. Surely, that which is here revealed is a matter of great importance. We ought to read these passages with great care, asking the Spirit of God to teach us the lessons for which He inspired all four of the Gospel writers to record them.

## The Obvious

Several things recorded here are obvious facts, facts so obvious that the only way they can be missed is by the willful, deliberate rejection of the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of the living God.

1. The Bible is, indeed, the Word of God. Matthew tells us that all this was done that the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 might be fulfilled. — “*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*” Because that was written in the Book of Zechariah, Luke writes, “*And it came to pass.*”

2. Our great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the omniscient, all-

knowing God. He told his disciples exactly where they would find the ass and her colt and exactly what would happen when they found them.

3. Our Redeemer is the sovereign Lord and King of all the universe. He did not come to Jerusalem to be made a King. He came into Jerusalem triumphantly as the King. He was going, by way of the cross, to receive His kingdom. But he was King already. The ass and her colt belonged to Him; and the men who owned them belonged to Him. All were His servants. All did His bidding.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is, always was, and always shall be King over everybody and everything, by virtue of the fact that He is God. The one true and living God is King everywhere. He always has His way and does His will. Here we see the Lord Jesus ascending up to Jerusalem as our Mediatorial King to take possession of His kingdom, the kingdom and dominion given to Him as the God-man by his Father, as the reward of His obedience to God as our Mediator (Romans 14:9; John 17:2; Philippians 2:9-11). Therefore, we read in verses 36-38 that *“as He went, they spread their clothes in the way. And when He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.”*

## An Allegory

But there is more to be learned from this historic narrative of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem than these facts. There are spiritual lessons in the story that tell us again how it is that God our Savior saves His elect. As the Holy Spirit tells us in Galatians 4 that the story of Sarah and Hagar is an allegory, this too is an allegory. It is a true, historical event; but it is more. It is an event that portrays God's free, sovereign, saving grace in and by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We commonly look upon the events of the Old Testament as

things designed and intended by our God to be pictures of grace. But, when we read the New Testament, for some strange reason, we tend to overlook the spiritual lessons contained in the historical events. That ought never to be the case.

We must never spiritualize Holy Scripture. I mean by that statement that we must never twist the Scriptures into whatever it is we want them to teach. To do so is to treat the Word of God with horrible irreverence. Yet, when we read the Word of God, we are always to look for the spiritual meaning, the Gospel message, each particular passage is intended to convey, knowing that every event in the earthly life of our Savior and every miracle performed by Him is written in the Book of God to give us a picture, an object lesson about His great salvation.

When we read the Book of God in this way, it comes to life. Several years ago, when he was just four years old, my grandson, Will, pointing to my Bible on my desk, asked, “Poppy, Is this where Jesus lives?” Though I gave him a much more thorough answer, explaining what I could of the person and work of our blessed Savior, in a very real sense the answer to his question is, “Yes, the Lord Jesus lives right here in this blessed Book.” Every word He spoke, every movement He made, every step He took was predetermined before the world began for the salvation of His elect and was designed by God’s eternal decree to show us something of God’s sovereign, electing, redeeming, saving, mercy, love, and grace through Christ our Redeemer. Even the small details, those things that appear to be no more than records with information show forth His great salvation.

Here, in Luke 19, we have such a record. Perhaps you have never before read the story as you are about to read it. If that is the case, I promise you that when I am done you will never read it the same again. This story of our Lord Jesus riding the wild ass’s colt through the streets of Jerusalem is really the old, old story of His sovereign, electing, fetching, irresistible, saving grace.

## Proof

As I said before, we must not give such a meaning to the story without clear evidence from Holy Scripture that this is the reason why the story was written. This may or may not have been the reason Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John had in mind as they recorded the story; but it is the reason God the Holy Spirit inspired them to write it down in the very words we have in the Gospel narratives. Let me show you two texts from the Old Testament that will demonstrate this.

First, look at the prophecy of Zechariah one more time (Zechariah 9:9-10).

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he *is* just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion *shall be* from sea *even* to sea, and from the river *even* to the ends of the earth.”

The prophet Zechariah shows us here that when Christ rode into Jerusalem, His triumphal entry was made in the way it was made to display the character of His kingdom and His work as our King. He came riding “*an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass,*” to show Himself in the infinite humility of His grace as One who is “*just and having salvation.*” He comes to break the bow of war and “*speak peace unto the heathen,*” and to do so in universal dominion “*from sea to sea, even to the ends of the earth.*”

In Job 11:12 we will see who the wild ass’s colt is, upon whom the King of Glory rides through the streets of Jerusalem in triumphant grace. There we are told that “*vain man*” is “*born like a wild ass’s colt.*” The ass’s colt upon which our Savior rode through Jerusalem is in Scripture a picture of fallen man.

## Disciples Sent

*“He sent two of his disciples”* (v. 29). — Wherever God has someone to save and whenever the appointed time comes for Him to save them, He sends a preacher (Romans 10:13-17). No man can believe the Gospel until someone preaches the Gospel to him. Notice that these two disciples were sent by the Master. No prophet or preacher in the Scriptures ever applied for the job! God’s preachers are chosen, called, gifted, and sent by Him.

These two disciples were sent on a very specific errand. They were sent to fetch something for the Lord Jesus. God sends His servants to fetch His elect to Himself, as David sent Ziba to fetch Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9). How I thank God that in the appointed time of love, He sent one of His servants to fetch me! Don’t you?

## An Assurance

When our Lord sent these disciples on their mission, He assured them that they would find what He sent them to get, saying, *“Saying, Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him hither”* (v. 30).

Men often raise this argument against the teaching of Holy Scripture with regard to God’s sovereignty. — “If election is true, if some are predestinated to be saved, and their salvation is sure, why preach?” What a foolish question! If I could convince you that every person who knocked at my door would be handed \$100.00, that it is a matter of absolute certainty, I doubt anyone would say, “If that is the case, why knock at the door.”

We preach the Gospel to all men because our God and Savior has sent us to do so. He says, *“Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.”* We preach the Gospel because *“it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”* And we preach the Gospel with confidence because He has told us plainly and assured us that those to whom

and for whom we are sent shall be saved. — “*All that the Father hath given Me shall come to Me.*” — “*Other sheep I have... Them also I must bring.*” All Christ’s sheep shall be found. Each of His elect shall be called and shall come (Isaiah 55:11; 2 Corinthians 2:14-16). And God’s elect will be found exactly where He puts them in His wise and good providence. There were many wells in Samaria; but that chosen woman to whom Christ came was found at a certain well. There were many trees along the Jericho Road; but Zacchaeus was found up a certain tree.

What an encouragement to preach the Gospel. — “*Ye shall find!*” There are no accidents in God’s world. The sovereign Lord puts His lost sheep exactly where He wants them. And He ties His wild ass’s colts exactly where He wants them tied.

### **An Ass's Colt**

Our Lord Jesus told these two disciples exactly what they were looking for in verse 31. He sent them to find “*a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat,*” as we saw in Job 11, “*a wild ass’s colt.*” Mark 11:4 tells us where they found this colt. — “*And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met.*” He sent them to find a colt tied outside in a place where two ways met. This was not the colt of a fine Kentucky Thoroughbred, or a Tennessee Walker, or even the colt of a Quarter Horse. This colt was the foal of an ass, a wild ass’s colt, “*whereon yet never man sat.*” (Matthew 2; Zech. 9:9).

What a good, accurate description and picture this is of every stubborn, unbroken, untamed, wild sinner. God’s Word is very plain in describing mankind in very clear terms, with very obvious meanings. And you will find that, unlike the preachers of this day, God never has anything good to say about fallen man. God describes our race as fallen, altogether, filthy, and incapable of doing good (Psalm 14). From the soles of our feet to the crown of our heads there is no soundness in us, nothing but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores (Isaiah 1). In Romans 3 we are described as being totally unprofitable and useless.

And the pictures of fallen men are even more debasing than

the words used to describe us. Like Lazarus, we are dead and stinking. Like the aborted infant described by Ezekiel, we are polluted in our own blood.

But here in Luke, and no less than eight times in the Word of God, we are represented, and very accurately represented, as wild ass's colts. That is how we are described in Job 11:12. You and I are all born by nature "*like a wild ass's colt,*" foolish, senseless, and stubborn, given to lust and debauchery, and wild. As the wild ass will not bear the yoke, so none will ever bow to the yoke of Christ, except the Son of God break him. Man by nature is like "*a wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up wind at her pleasure*" (Jeremiah 2:24; Job 39:5).

In the movies you see old men and women riding donkeys, and get the idea that they are nice, gentle, sweet animals, the kind you would like to have for pets, if you just had the room. But that is never the case by nature. It is their nature to be mean. If you try to get one to ride you, to carry a load, to pull a cart, until he is broken and tamed, he will buck, and kick, and bite. If all else fails, he will just sit down.

That's a pretty good picture of man. Made by God and made for his glory, all men ought to gladly give thanks to Him, submit to His rule, worship Him, and give Him His due. But just try to get one to worship God, and watch him kick. Tell those sweet, religious wild ass's the truth about man, about God, about Christ, about redemption and grace, and watch them buck and bite! Yes, man is well described and represented as a "*wild ass's colt.*"

## Colt Tied

Did you notice that this colt was tied (v. 30)? People love to think they are independent and free. Don't they? But the fact is, every man by nature is tied and bound, by sin, by Satan, by tradition, by peer pressure, and by religion.

The colt was tied in a place where two ways met, at a crossroad. So it is with all men. All are bound and tied at a crossroad, at a place where two ways meet: the way to heaven

and the way to hell, the way of grace and the way of works, the way of life and the way of death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Fallen man is tied, like this “*wild ass’s colt*,” outside the door, not in the Door, outside of grace, outside of Christ, not in Christ.

## Loose Him

The Lord Jesus sent His two disciples to loose this “*wild ass’s colt*.”

“Go ye into the village over against *you*; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring *him hither*. And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose *him*? thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him” (vv. 30-31).

Everywhere in the Book of God the grace of God is set before us as that which looses men. Religion binds. Grace looses! We are in the loosing business. These disciples found the wild ass’s colt, just like the Master said they would. When they did, they loosed the ass’s colt. They were told to loose him “*because the Lord hath need of him*.”

Imagine that! What possible need could the Son of God have for a wild ass’s colt, like you or me? He needs everyone He fetches to Himself so that He may see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, so that He may ride him triumphantly through the streets of Jerusalem and garner the praises of His people for His great goodness as the King of Grace and Glory!

“*And they brought him to Jesus*” (v. 35). In John 12:12-15 the Spirit of God sheds more light on this. We have seen that these disciples found the ass’s colt and brought him to the Savior, and they did. But in John’s narrative the Holy Spirit tells us that it was Christ Himself that did the finding.

“On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed *is* the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus,

when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt."

It is Christ Himself who comes seeking and finding His people, it is Christ Himself who fetches sinners by His omnipotent grace to Himself through the preaching of the Gospel.

### And Then...

What happened when they brought this wild ass's colt to the Savior? — "*They cast their garments upon the colt*" (v. 35). Not only is it true that all who come to Christ are washed in His blood and robed in His righteousness, clothed with the garments of salvation, they find among His saints a people who receive them and love them, and willingly give them the shirts off their backs.

Then, they sat the Master on the colt, spread their clothes in the way, and watched Him ride in triumphant glory through Jerusalem, as "*they began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen.*" (Not the works they had done, but the works they had seen!) "*Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.*"

Here is a wild ass's colt, broken by grace and ridden by the Son of God, and he doesn't buck, or kick, or bite. He found the Savior's yoke easy and his burden light.

The religious crowd saw what was going on, heard the shouts of praise to God, and the pronounced blessedness of Christ the King, but they did not have a clue what was happening (vv. 39-40).

### Why?

Why an ass's colt? Why not a great white stallion? 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 gives us the answer.

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called* But God hath chosen the foolish things

of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

I once read that one of the rarest mammals in world is the African Wild Ass. There are not more than a few hundred in the world. I am not really very interested in that. But I am interested in the people represented in our text by the wild ass's colt. And I assure you that they are very, very rare.

“To understand these things aright,  
This grand distinction should be known:  
Though all are sinners in God's sight,  
There are but few so in their own.  
To such as these our Lord was sent;  
They're only sinners who repent.

What comfort can a Savior bring  
To those who never felt their woe?  
A sinner is a sacred thing;  
The Holy Ghost hath made him so.  
New life from Him we must receive,  
Before for sin we rightly grieve.

This faithful saying let us own,  
Well worthy 'tis to be believed,  
That Christ into the world came down,  
That sinners might by Him be saved.  
Sinners are high in His esteem,  
And sinners highly value Him.”

*Joseph Hart*

# Chapter 114

## “He Beheld the City and Wept”

Luke 19:41-44

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things [which belong] unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation” (Luke 19:41-44).

Among the ancient pagans, there were numerous weeping gods. The dismembered moon goddess of the ancient Mexicans is portrayed as having tears of gold flowing from her eyes. In Joseph Smith’s Book of Mormon, he relates his fabrication of a time when Enoch saw God weeping, tears that fell as rain upon the mountains. (Mr. Smith must have smoked one too many peace pipes with the Western Indians!)

Of course, we have no regard for pagan idols and the religious myths built around them. But there are three specific passages of Holy Scripture that portray God our Savior weeping tears more precious than gold. In these three texts of Scripture we see the incarnate God, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ in tears. Surely, there are things to be observed in the tender heart of our Savior, both to instruct and comfort us, as we see Him weeping.

## John 11:35

In John 11 we see a wondrous thing. You know the context. Lazarus, a man the Savior loved, has died. The Lord Jesus has come to raise him from the dead. Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary, were broken-hearted and weeping. In the company of His bereaved friends at the tomb of Lazarus, we see the Son of God weeping and groaning in himself (John 11:32-38).

“Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.”

“*Jesus wept.*” — That 35<sup>th</sup> verse is the smallest verse in the entire Bible. Yet, in some respects, it is the largest. Here is our incarnate God weeping with His weeping people. What can this mean? Why has God the Holy Spirit caused these words to be written? What do they teach us?

They teach us that the Lord Jesus Christ, our blessed God and Savior, is a real man, a man touched with the feeling of our infirmities. His love for Lazarus was great. When they saw Him weeping, “*Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!*” Oh, how the Son of God loves us!

Though we sorrow not as others who have no hope, God's people feel pain and sorrow just like other people do. Sorrow does not necessarily imply rebellion against the will of God, or unbelief. The most fragrant flowers are found growing in the soil of sorrow. Were there no tears in our eyes, there could be no rainbow in our souls.

If our God and Savior is so tender and sympathetic that the sorrows of His friends caused Him to weep, how much more we ought to weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn!

## Hebrews 5:7-8

Hebrews 5:7-8 describes our Savior in the days of His flesh.

“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.”

I have no doubt that this passage has specific reference to our Savior’s agony of heart and soul in Gethsemane (Mark 14:34-36). In His time of great heaviness, sorrow, and distress, we find our Lord Jesus in prayer. What an example He sets before us. The first one to whom we should turn in every time of trouble is our heavenly Father. Our God should be the first to hear the words of our complaints. He may or may not relieve our trouble; but it is good for our souls for us to unburden our hearts at the throne of grace. There, and only there will we discover the all-sufficiency of His grace (Hebrews 4:16; James 5:13).

What was the cause of our Lord’s great heaviness and sorrow in Gethsemane? What was it that crushed our Master’s heart? What so greatly disturbed him? It certainly was not the fear of physical pain or the fear of dying. It was not even the fear of dying upon the cross. Our great Savior came into this world in our flesh that He might die as our Substitute at Calvary.

That which crushed our Savior’s heart was the anticipation of being made sin for us. The heavy, heavy burden which crushed his very soul was the enormous load of sin and guilt, the sin and guilt of all God’s elect which was about to be His.

Our Savior’s great sorrow was caused by His anticipation of being made sin for us. “It was,” wrote J.C. Ryle, “a sense of the unutterable weight of our sins and transgressions which were

then specially laid upon Him.” He who knew no sin was about to be made sin for us. He who is the only man who really knows what sin is, the only man who sees sin as God sees it was about to become sin. He who is the holy, harmless, undefiled Lamb of God was about to be made a curse for us. The holy Son of God was about to be forsaken by His Father.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, “*began to be sore amazed,*” to be in great consternation and astonishment at the sight of all the sins of His people coming upon Him; at the black storm of wrath that was gathering thick over Him; at the sword of justice which was brandished against Him; and at the curses of the righteous law, which, like thunderbolts of vengeance from heaven, were directed at Him. No wonder the verse closes by telling us that, in consideration of these things, our Savior began “*to be very heavy!*” That which crushed our Savior’s very heart and soul was the very thing for which He came into the world. It was the anticipation of all that He must endure as our Substitute.

The message of Holy Scripture is Substitution. The Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, our Mediator and Surety died in our place, in the place of God’s elect, as our Substitute. By His own blood, when He was made sin for us, when He was slain in our stead, He satisfied the justice of God for us, magnified His holy law, made it honorable, and purchased for us the complete, everlasting forgiveness of all our sins. He died, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. Christ died at Calvary so that God might be both just and the Justifier of all who believe. It is written, “*By mercy and truth iniquity is purged*” (Proverbs 16:6; Romans 3:19-28; Ephesians 1:7).

Since the Lord Jesus Christ died as the sinners’ Substitute, since He has met and fully satisfied the justice of God for us, believing sinners have no reason ever to fear condemnation by God, accusation before God, or separation from God (Romans 8:1-4, 31-39). Since Christ died for me, I cannot die. If you are in Christ, for you there is no possibility of condemnation by Him, accusation before Him, or separation from Him.

It was the enormous load of our sin and guilt which crushed our Savior’s heart in Gethsemane (Isaiah 53:4-6).

Th' enormous load of all my guilt  
Was on my Savior laid,  
When He, Who knew and did no sin,  
For sinners, sin was made!

“Awake, O sword,” in furious wrath,  
Jehovah cried; and He,  
(The Lamb of God, my Substitute!),  
Was sacrificed for me!

In that same way, by grace and truth,  
My ransomed soul is made  
“The righteousness of God in Him,”  
And I from sin am freed!

This wondrous mystery of grace! —  
Salvation, full and free,  
Shall be the subject of my songs  
Throughout eternity!

### Luke 19:41-44

Here in Luke 19:41-44, we see the Lord Jesus weeping over the city of Jerusalem.

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things *which belong* unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

Behold the Man Christ Jesus: tender, merciful, gracious, and compassionate! Behold your God, full of compassion! — “*He is gracious, full of compassion*” (Psalms 112:4; 78:38-39; 111:4;

145:8-9).

Here we see the great tenderness and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ toward sinners. When He came near Jerusalem for the last time, “*He beheld the city and wept over it.*” He knew the character of the people who lived in Jerusalem. Their cruelty, their self-righteousness, their stubbornness, their obstinate prejudice against the Gospel, their pride of heart were all things open to Him. He knew that they were plotting to murder Him, and that in just a few days their hands would drip with His blood. Yet, He beheld the city and wept.

Why did he weep over the lost and ruined city? His own words in these four verses give us three distinct reasons for His great pity.

1. The Lord Jesus wept for His countrymen because they were ignorant of the Gospel (v. 42).
2. He wept for them because He knew the judgment that was coming upon them (v. 43).
3. And He wept over the city because He knew that the judgment they suffered was the result of them despising the time of their visitation (v. 44; Proverbs 1:23-33; 29:1; Romans 9:1-3, 31-33; 10:1-4).

# Chapter 115

## Purging the House of God

Luke 19:45-48

“And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him, And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him” (Luke 19:45-48).

What if the Son of God were to come to church next Sunday? — Have you ever tried to imagine what would happen if the Lord Jesus were to visit one of our modern churches, if He were to attend one of those things people call “worship services” held in His name? What would our Savior do, if He were to walk into one of our modern church buildings? If the Son of God were to come into most any church in this day, He would do exactly what He did in the passage before us.

Mark tells us that, after He had driven out those who sold doves and dumped the money-changers’ money in the floor, turning their tables upside-down, He would not allow them to even carry their vessels through the temple. We would be shocked to see the things Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us our Savior did in the house of God that evening. But, really, we should be shocked that it is not done. This was not some gentle thing that our Savior did, after He had persuaded the people it really ought to be done. It was something our Master did in utter fury. John gives a vivid account of a similar event that had taken

place three years earlier (John 2:13-17).

“And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.”

When our Savior first began His public ministry, the first time He went with His disciples to keep the passover, He saw in the house of God an unbearable display of irreverence and utter contempt among people who convinced themselves that they were serving the Lord. Now, three years later, He came to Jerusalem again. Again, it was the time of the Jews' passover. And things were exactly as they had been before.

## The Offense

What was the great offense here? What were these people doing that was so bad? The business carried on in the forecourt was connected to the sacrificial offerings and the atonement money required by the law. The Jews came to Jerusalem at the time of passover from many different countries (John 12:20; Acts. 2:5). The money-changers were there for what appears to be a very good reason. If they were not there, the people would have to go to a little, needless trouble to get their currency exchanged somewhere else, so that they could pay their required half-shekel.

The same thing could be said for the other businessmen who were there “serving the Lord and his people.” If the people were to keep the passover, they needed sacrifices: animals, wine, oil, salt, and so forth. The poor, who could not afford larger sacrifices, were permitted by the law to bring a pair of doves. Those who sold doves simply made things easy and convenient. — Of course, they had to make a profit.

What could be wrong with these things? We read of nothing in any of the narratives that these people did except that which appeared useful. Their crime was that the priests and the people sought to enrich themselves in the name of serving God. Does that seem familiar? It should. The biggest business in the world is big business religion. Their crime was that they had turned the house of God into a den of thieves, taking that which was to be “*the house of prayer*” and making it a house of pleasure. Oh, they read the law and kept the feasts with great pomp and impressive ceremonies; but they made the Word of God of no effect by their practices.

## Four Lessons

Is there a message in all this for us? The temple was destroyed 2000 years ago. We do not observe those holy days the Jew’s profaned. And, though I’ve seen a good many strange things in churches, I have never yet seen people selling animals and conducting a currency exchange in a church house. Such things would not surprise me; but I haven’t yet seen them. So I ask again, “Is there a message in all this for us?” Indeed there is.

In fact, there are many, very important lessons to be learned from this passage. Here are four.

1. The purging of the temple by our Lord Jesus stands out as one of the Master’s greatest displays of His absolute divinity. The fact that the Scribes, and Pharisees, and Priests stood by and silently watched all that our Lord did here, strikes me as being as marvelous as our Savior ordering the Roman soldiers in Gethsemane, and the legion of demons who begged His permission to go into a herd of hogs. Those who observed these things must have been completely awestruck.
2. Learn this, too. The house of God is His house. Christ is the Head, the only head, of His church. He is the King in this kingdom. There is no voice of authority, but His voice, and no rule of faith and practice, but His Word.

3. Sometimes faithful men, men who seek the glory and honor of God, must get angry and show their anger. Those who would honor God cannot give approval to that which dishonors Him. To be silent is to give approval. Our Savior showed His disapproval of the wickedness before Him. Let us follow His example.

4. The church of God is a house of prayer. When I speak of God's church and God's house, I'm not talking about a building. The church and temple and house of God is the assembly of His saints in the name of Christ for worship (Matthew 18:20; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17). There is no room in the house of God for anything but prayer — worship.

Be sure you understand that. — There is no room in the house of God for anything except the worship of God, and worship according to the Word and Spirit of God. As it was in the days of Nehemiah, so it is today. The strength of those who are supposed to bear the burden has decayed; and there is a lot of garbage (much rubbish) in the house of God. If we would worship and serve our God, we must clear His house of all the rubbish men bring into it by their vain philosophies, religious traditions, and foolish sentiments (Nehemiah 4:10).

I say to you who read these lines, as Peter said to those who stood before him on the Day of Pentecost, “*Save yourselves from this untoward (warped, winding, crooked, and perverse) generation*” (Acts 2:40). There is so much rubbish in the churches of this day that a true Gospel message cannot be preached in most places of worship, without utter warfare breaking out among those who profess to be worshipping God and serving Him. Everyone has “*a form of godliness*” (religion), to which they tenaciously adhere, all the while denying the power of true godliness (the Gospel of the grace of God). The religious generation in which we find ourselves today was well described by the apostle Paul as a people, “*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Timothy 3:7).

There is so much rubbish in religion that the first thing a preacher has to do is get a big shovel and dump truck, clear out the rubbish and haul it to the garbage dump. Until that is done, nothing else can be done. We cannot build the walls of Zion upon a pile of garbage. We cannot build a wall of hope and security on religious rubbish. The foundation cannot be laid until the rubbish is recognized, dealt with, and hauled away. And cleaning up a pile of garbage is never easy or pleasant. But it must be done. Faithful men in every generation have found the work both necessary and costly. Moses had to deal with Korah and His crowd. Elijah constantly had to confront Ahab and Jezebel. Hezekiah had trouble on his hands when he destroyed the brazen serpent. Paul was compelled to deal with judaizing legalists everywhere he went.

I have preached in a good many churches in the last 40 years; and I think I know where the problem is. I think I know what the rubbish is. Let me point out three things that must be dealt with, if we are going to build a wall of hope and refuge for eternity bound sinners in our day.

## The Law of God

In religious circles today, I am talking about churches of every brand, the holy, pure, immaculate, unchanging law of God has been whittled down to a set of rules for men to obey by mere outward religious exercise and outward conformity. Righteousness has been reduced to a work of man. This was the charge our Lord laid against the scribes and Pharisees of His day (Matthew 23:25-27). And this is the charge that must be laid against the religion and religious leaders of our day.

Saul of Tarsus was in exactly that condition before God saved him. He was a devoutly religious man. His religious zeal and devotion would put you and me to shame. But he didn't know God at all. He had gone to church all his life. He graduated from the Gamaliel School of Theology with honors. He taught the Scriptures. He was a man of indisputable morality. And he was a law-keeping legalist of the first order (Philippians 3:5-6). Saul of

Tarsus was a man who was deeply religious, who lived by the law, and boasted of his righteousness before the law. But he did not know God or his law. He was as lost as any sinner on the top side of God's earth. Then, something happened (Acts 9; Romans 7:9). He said, "*I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*"

God the Holy Spirit came to that poor, lost religionist, revealed Christ in him, and in doing so revealed the true character of God's holy law to him. When he saw Christ and was convinced by God the Holy Spirit that righteousness was accomplished and brought in by Christ (John 16:8-11), for the first time in his life, Saul was made to see that God requires truth in the inward parts; and he had nothing in himself but deceit. For the first time in his life, he saw that there was no comeliness in him, but only sin. God stripped him buck naked and brought him to shame (Romans 7:9-11). The law he once boasted of keeping now made him tremble, for it exposed his sin.

Has the Lord Jesus Christ ever come to you by the saving operations of His Spirit and revealed his holy law to you? Hear what He declares, — "*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:20).

That righteousness that God requires, you cannot perform. It is a righteousness performed for us by Christ and given to us by grace. And godliness, true godliness is not outward, but inward. — "*The Lord looketh on the heart.*" Christianity is not a creed, but a Person. It is not outward, but inward. It is "*Christ in you, the hope of glory!*"

That's the first piece of garbage that must be hauled away, if we are to have a house of prayer and praise to God. We must be made to see that no man can, by anything he does or experiences, make himself righteous before God. The bondwoman and her son (works religion and all who promote it) must be cast out!

## Degenerate Worship

The *second* problem is this. — Worship, or what people call worship, has degenerated into nothing but religious entertainment and ceremony performed under the guise of worship. Most churches are nothing but religious social clubs, with rules, regulations, and ceremonies, and a good place for businessmen to network. If God the Holy Spirit did not exist, it would not change a thing in most churches. Their program would move along without a glitch.

You don't need the Spirit of God to make a decision for Jesus. But you must have Him to be born again. You don't need God the Holy Spirit to reform your life. But you must have Him to be regenerated. You don't need the Holy Spirit to make a profession of faith. But you must have Him to get faith. You don't need the Holy Spirit to learn a creed and learn to fight for it. But you must have Him to learn the Gospel. You don't need the Spirit to stand up and testify. But you must have Him to bow down and worship. You don't need the Spirit of God to be devoted to religious activity and service. But you must have Him to sit at the Master's feet and hear His Word.

You don't need the Spirit of God to be immersed in water. But you must have Him to be baptized into Christ. You don't need the Holy Spirit to observe the Lord's Supper. But you must have Him to commune with Christ and remember Him. You don't need God the Holy Spirit to recite a prayer. But you must have Him to pray. You don't need the Spirit to give out a lesson. But you must have Him to preach a message. You don't need the Holy Spirit to give a tithe. But you must have Him to offer two mites in the name of the Lord. You don't need God the Holy Spirit to love religion. But you must have Him to love one another. You don't need the Spirit of God to meet together. But you must have Him to be "*the temple of the living God!*"

If God the Holy Spirit did not exist, if there were no God, no Christ, no salvation, no eternal life, with most religious people, nothing would change. In most churches, nothing would change. You don't need God to have a business meeting. But you must

have Him to have a prayer (worship) meeting. You don't need God to be in the church. But you must have Him to be in Christ. You don't need God to have a church house. But you must have Him to be a "*habitation of God through the Spirit.*"

As I read about our Savior driving the money-changers and sacrifice peddlers out of the temple, I cannot help thinking to myself, how furious He must be with men's intrusions into His house today. There is no place in the house of God, the house of prayer, for anything except that which involves the worship of God. Nothing should ever take place in the house of God, in the assembly of God's saints except Gospel preaching, Gospel ordinances, prayer, and praise

That's the second problem. The churches of our day have said good-by to God. And worship has degenerated into nothing but man-centered religious activity. Cast out your programs and ceremonies, or you will never worship God!

### A Corrupt Message

Here's the *third* problem in churches around the world today. — The church of this perverse age has substituted the message of the Gospel, the message of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ, for a corrupt and perverse message of works.

Everywhere today people are told to stand up and be counted. The Gospel of God demands that you bow down and worship. There's a difference! The message of substitution, the message of our Lord's blessed obedience and sin-atonement sacrifice, and salvation by Him, in Him, from Him, and for Him has been replaced with — "Will you let God save you?" — "Won't you give your heart to Jesus?" — "The decision is yours." — "You must do your part." — "What's your decision?" — "The Lord wants to save you." — "You need to start serving the Lord." — "Open your heart to the Lord, and He will come in."

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you,

and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-9).

When we have cleared away the rubbish, the Foundation can be laid and the walls of Zion can be built. The Foundation is Jesus Christ crucified. In his day the only place where John the Baptist could preach the Gospel was in the wilderness. There he lifted up his solitary voice in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, crying out to eternity-bound sinners, “*Behold, the Lamb of God!*” Let us, like John the Baptist, cry out to immortal souls in this wilderness, “*Behold, the Lamb of God!*”

Jesus Christ is not just a good example after whom you must pattern your life. He is “*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!*” He was not a religious reformer. He was and is God our Savior. He did not die as a martyr in a noble cause. He died as the Lamb of God, a sin-atonement, blood sacrifice for sin. He is not God who wants to save. He is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him. He is “*God mighty to save!*”

If the Lord God will give us grace today to clean out the rubbish, drive the merchandisers and their merchandise out of his house, and make His house a house of prayer for needy sinners, maybe, just maybe we will see the same thing happen that happened when Our Savior did it. We might just see sinners healed by His almighty grace (Matthew 21:14).

# Chapter 116

## Ungodliness in the House of God

### Luke 20:1-8

“And it came to pass, [that] on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the Gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon [him] with the elders, And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority? And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. And they answered, that they could not tell whence [it was]. And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things” (Luke 20:1-8).

In this passage of Scripture we see our Lord Jesus Christ walking in the temple with His disciples, teaching and preaching the Gospel. As He walked back and forth through the house of God, a multitude gathered around and listened intently to His every word. The event recorded here took place the day after our Lord cursed the barren fig tree and drove the money changers from the temple, two days after His entrance into Jerusalem.

In the crowd, listening to our Savior’s doctrine, were those chief priests, scribes, and elders who were determined to destroy the Master, His doctrine, and His people. Once more, they thought they had a perfect opportunity to discredit Him. The Lord

Jesus had come into Jerusalem accepting the praises of men as the Messiah, the Christ of God. He entered the house of God, drove out the money changers, and set things in order as the Master of the house.

On top of all that, He called the house of God His house. Thus declaring Himself to be God. As He preached the Gospel of God in the house of God, contrary to the accepted traditions and customs of the Jews, these great, respected, scholarly infidels, who were the religious leaders of the Jewish world, demanded of the Lord Jesus the source of His authority.

What determined hatred these Chief Priests and Scribes and Elders had for the Son of God! What had the Lord Jesus done? He had preached the Gospel to the poor. He had gone about healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people. Was this the cause of all their hatred and malignity? Strange as that may seem, it was. That is cause enough to Satan and his seed. It always has been and always will be, so long as the world shall stand. Is the offence of the cross ceased? Oh no! Let any of God's servants in the present hour preach the Gospel the Master preached, declaring that salvation is in His name alone, throwing all the goodness and righteousness of men to the ground and declaring that Christ's blood and righteousness are the solitary cause of a sinner's acceptance with God, and the religious leaders around him will rise up against him like angry hornet's buzzing around his head.

When the religious, spiritual leaders of a church, denomination, nation, or age do not know God, when spiritual leaders are really infidels, those who blindly follow their blind guides do so to the eternal peril of their souls, and to the eternal peril of all who are under their influence!

Here are four spiritual evils, four glaring matters of ungodliness, which stand out in these verses, as beacons to warn us.

## Spiritual Ignorance

*First*, Luke shows us the evil of spiritual ignorance displayed in these religious men. You may think, “How can spiritual ignorance be called an evil thing? Can a person be faulted for his ignorance in the things of God?”

Yes, a person can and should be, indeed shall be held accountable by God for that which he could have known and should have known had he simply walked in the light God gave him. Do you understand the implications of what I have just stated? Not only will God Almighty hold you accountable at the Day of Judgment for everything you have heard and despised concerning the Gospel of His dear Son, He will hold you accountable for everything you could have heard had you chosen to do so.

Those things are true of all men; but they are especially true concerning those men who assume the responsibility of teaching others and preaching to others and leading others in the name of God.

That man who speaks to, teaches, leads, and preaches to others in the name of God better have a firm, well-grounded assurance concerning a few things. Writing as I now do in God’s name, I assume a tremendous weight of responsibility. Knowing what I do of God’s character, His Word, and the seriousness of this business of addressing immortal souls in the name of God, I would not dare speak (or write) another word, or continue another day in the work of the ministry, if I were not certain of these things. I say to any man, old or young, who is just chomping at the bit to be a preacher, before you assume this work, you better be certain that...

1. You know God and the Gospel of His grace.
2. God has called you and sent you to this work.
3. You have a message from God.
4. You faithfully proclaim God’s message.

Though all are responsible for their own souls, those who are set as watchmen over immortal souls are also responsible for those

souls (Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:1-20).

What does all that have to do with Luke 20:1-8? Just this: — These chief priests, scribes, and elders stand before us as glaring examples of the fact that those who hold highest place in the religious world are often totally ignorant of the things of God.

These men were not peons. They were the most highly trained, specialized religious scholars, selected from an elite group of elite men. They were not just priests, they were the chief priests. They were not just teachers, they were the scribes. They were not just elders, they were the elders.

These men were regarded by the religious world of their day as the very source and fountain of all spiritual knowledge. They were, for the most part, direct descendants of Aaron; and they could prove it. Their doctrine had the full weight and force of mainstream, historic Jewish tradition; and they could prove it.

But these men did not know God from a box of rocks. Spiritually, they were totally blind. They had the Scriptures memorized, categorized, and compartmentalized; but they had absolutely no understanding of the message of the Book. They could tell you everything you could want to know about God and His Son, the Christ, the Messiah, except one thing. They could not tell you who He is! They could not spot Him when He stood in their midst.

Spiritual knowledge comes by divine revelation. I wonder if we will ever learn this. In spiritual matters nothing matters except spiritual matters. Worldly approval, academic scholarship, historic approval, celebrated fame, religious order, and religious tradition are all meaningless. Indeed, these things are an absolute hindrance unless we are taught of God. We know nothing until God, by His Spirit, causes the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to shine in our hearts. Christ must be revealed in us (2 Corinthians 4:3-6)

Once that happens, once Christ is revealed in a person, he is unceasingly taught of God and convinced of three things. These three things are the most important truths we ever consider. They are indescribably deep. We can never fully learn them. Yet, if we

are taught of God, we will never cease to learn them, as long as we live in this world. They are...

1. Sin — Our Own Sin, the Depravity of our Hearts, the Corruption of our Evil Deeds, and the Filth of our Righteousnesses!
2. Righteousness — The Righteousness of God Accomplished and Brought in for Us by Christ Obedience as our Representative!
3. Judgment — Judgment Finished at Calvary by the Substitutionary Satisfaction of Divine Justice (John 16:8-11; Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:21)!

As you care for your soul and for the souls of your families and for all who may be influenced by you, try the spirits to see whether they be of God (1 John 4:1-3).

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

Spiritual ignorance, ignorance of Christ and His Gospel, among preachers, teachers, and religious leaders is an inexcusable evil, by which multitudes are being led to hell. When blind men are led by blind men, both fall into the ditch.

Yet, there is more to aggravate the wickedness of their ignorance. They were wilfully ignorant of Christ. Their ignorance arose from their enmity against the Master. It was the fruit of their malice toward and hatred of Christ and His doctrine. Our Lord’s miraculous works spoke for themselves. None but God could do the work He did. Nicodemus recognized that fact (John 3:2). And every man with common sense recognizes it. But these men refused the obvious, because to acknowledge the obvious

would require that they acknowledge Christ and His doctrine.

## Religious Curiosity

The *second* evil, the second display of ungodliness we see in these men, and often see in the house of God today is the evil of religious curiosity.

What multitudes there are who are curious about spiritual things! The more mysterious a matter is, the more their curiosity is peaked. They care nothing for plainly revealed truth. They despise things that are obvious and important, needful and vital. But, they love to talk about and debate obscure things. In verses 27-37 the Sadducees asked the Master a trick question about the resurrection. Mind you, they did not believe in the resurrection; but they wanted to debate it.

People like the Scribes and their companions abound in every generation. They are all alike enemies to the pure truths of the Gospel. Their religion is nothing but curiosity. You will be wise to avoid them as you would the plague (1 Timothy 1:4).

## Religious Pride

*Third*, these religious hypocrites also show us the horrid evil of religious pride and arrogance. Here is a group of men, pretending that they are doing God's service, daring to challenge the incarnate God Himself about His authority, moved by nothing but envy, jealousy, arrogance, and pride. They were not even slightly motivated by the glory of God. Their only concern was their own position and power. They said, "*By what authority doest thou these things?*"

They could not refute His doctrine. They could not make any charge of wickedness stick. They could not deny the power of God displayed in His works. The only thing left was to challenge His right to do the things He did in the name of God. They were asking, "By what authority do you preach? Who ordained you? What right do you have to curse a fig tree, created by God? How

dare you come into the house of God and set things in order, without consulting us?"

Nothing makes a lost religious man more arrogant, insecure, envious, and malicious than the sight of another man doing the will of God, preaching the truth of God he refuses to preach, consecrated to the glory of God, while he is consecrated to nothing but himself, secure in the place of God, while he senses nothing but insecurity, at rest in the will of God, when he cannot find a moment's rest in his soul.

It is spiritual pride and arrogance, especially among religious leaders, which keeps men from bowing to the truth of God, when plainly confronted with it; and the embarrassment of having that wickedness exposed in their own hearts makes those, who normally appear to be so sugary sweet, raging persecutors. It was the spiritual arrogance of these men which drug them down to hell. Everyone acknowledged that John the Baptist was a prophet of God; but these fine men were not about to sit at the feet of such an unacceptable teacher. Because they would not hear God's servant, they could not believe God's Son. Christ declared and displayed in undeniable ways His messiahship and Godhood; but they refused to believe him. It would simply have cost them too much. Because they refused to hear God's messenger and refused to believe God's Son, they despised God's ordinance of believer's baptism.

## Spiritual Dishonesty

Spiritual ignorance always leads to spiritual arrogance; and spiritual ignorance and arrogance always produce the evil of spiritual dishonesty. Those who are, by their willful unbelief, prejudiced against the truth of God, in the attempt to justify themselves, will, without hesitation, lie and act in dishonesty to their own consciences. There is nothing dishonest men will not do to save face before men. Our Lord did not ask these men a hard, perplexing question. He just asked them whether John's ministry was of God, or of men (vv. 3-4).

They did not even think about giving a plain, honest, strait

forward answer. Immediately, they put their heads together, not to find out the truth, but to figure out how to save face (vv. 5-7, 31). Rather than speak the truth, they told a direct and obvious lie. They said, "*We cannot tell.*" In reply to our Lord's question whether John's baptism was from heaven or of men, "*they answered that they could not tell.*" That was an obvious lie. They could have told, but they would not do so. They knew that if they said what they really believed they would condemn themselves. If they confessed that John was a prophet sent from God, they would be guilty of a gross inconsistency in not believing his testimony about Christ as the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Savior of needy sinners, who came to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Men and women will say anything rather than acknowledge themselves to be in the wrong. Lying is just one of the sins to which the human heart is most naturally inclined, and one of the most common evils in the world. Gehazi, Ananias, and Sapphira have more followers and imitators in the house of God than Peter and Paul.

## Lessons

You can mark this down as a matter of certainty. — If God is pleased to use you, men will envy you, despise you, and do everything within their power to discredit you. If they cannot destroy you, they will try to destroy your influence. Our Lord Jesus found His most malicious enemies (the Pharisees) in the house of God. Paul found his greatest foes (false apostles and Judaizers) in the house of God. Even the beloved John had his foe (Diotrephes) in the house of God.

The best way I know of to deal with those who oppose us, oppose the Gospel of the grace of God, oppose the work we do, and oppose our God is to ignore them, just as our Lord did, when He replied, "*Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things*" (v. 8).

Rarely do men and women rightly esteem and value the ministry of the Gospel. In this passage, as He often did, our Lord

Jesus highly commended John the Baptist and the ministry the Lord gave him in his day. Like John the Baptist, every true Gospel preacher is sent of God to point out the Lamb of God and declare His work, to prepare the way of the Lord, to call sinners to repentance, showing them the way of life and faith in Christ (Isaiah 52:7), and to leave all who believe not without excuse.

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. [And] be at peace among yourselves.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

# Chapter 117

## God's Church – His Vineyard

### Luke 20:9-19

“Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent [him] away empty. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated [him] shamefully, and sent [him] away empty. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast [him] out. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence [him] when they see him. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed [him]. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard [it], they said, God forbid. And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them” (Luke 20:9-19).

We have before us in these verses one of our Lord's parables that is recorded in great detail by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. That fact alone is sufficient to demonstrate that this is a parable of tremendous importance.

This is clearly a historical parable. We are told in verse nineteen that the chief priests, scribes and elders of the Jews "*perceived that*" the Lord Jesus "*had spoken the parable against them.*" The history of the Jewish nation, from the time that the Lord brought them out of Egypt until the time of their destruction in 70 AD, is set before us in these verses. Under the emblem of a vineyard and husbandmen (vinedressers), our Master tells us the story of God's dealings with that nation, both in great mercy and in great judgment.

This parable is recorded here in the Book of God to stand as a beacon to warn us, lest we who have received and experienced far greater mercies than the Jews ever did should also at last be dashed in pieces upon the rocks of God's righteous retribution and judgment.

There is no question that our Lord is here speaking directly to the Scribes and Pharisees, to the nation of Israel and their religious leaders in His day. They are the husbandmen described in the parable. Their sins are set before us in plain words. They persecuted and killed God's prophets, generation after generation. At last, they murdered God's darling Son!

There can be no doubt that the parable was directly intended to be a word of condemnation against the Jewish nation. But it is a serious mistake for anyone to read these words and say, "That applies to the Jews. It has no reference to me." "A godly man," wrote John Trapp, "reads the Scriptures as he doth the statute-book. He holds himself concerned in all that he reads. He finds his name written in every passage and lays it to heart, as spoken to him. The wicked, on the other side, put off all they like not, and dispose of it to others."

Let us not be so foolish. The parable of the wicked husbandmen is a parable by which the Son of God speaks to us. — "*He that hath an ear, let him hear.*" The Jews who heard this

parable fall from the lips of the Son of God refused to heed its lessons. Therefore that nation is to this day under the curse of God's holy wrath and just judgment. When they had the light, they refused to walk in the light. Therefore God has sent blindness and darkness upon them.

This is what God the Holy Spirit intends for us to learn from this parable: — *“Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee”* (Romans 11:20-21). With that warning in mind, I direct your attention to the very important lessons to be learned from this parable.

The churches, preachers, teachers and spiritual leaders of our land, those who profess to be God's servants, those who are responsible to teach us God's Word and God's ways, have long since abandoned the Word and truth of God. The result of that apostasy is the abounding ungodliness of this reprobate age. Let us beware, lest we follow this religious generation to everlasting ruin.

## God's Church

*First*, we see here that God's Church in this world is His vineyard (v. 9). When I refer to God's Church in this world, as is the case in all the New Testament, I primarily have in mind the local Church, local Gospel churches. There certainly are applications of this parable to be made to the Church universal; but it speaks principally of the Church local, local assemblies of men and women who profess to be followers of Christ and His Gospel. Every true Gospel church is a vineyard of God's planting. It belongs to the Lord. He separated a piece of ground for it. He planted it. He has hedged it about. A true Gospel Church is the greatest blessing God can bestow upon any community in this world. What a great and rare privilege and blessing it is to live in a place where God has raised up a people to worship Him, by whom the Gospel of His free, sovereign, saving grace is proclaimed!

## Husbandmen

We are also told in verse 9 that the Lord God has let out this vineyard to us, His people, as His husbandmen. There is no greater privilege than this in the world, and no greater responsibility under heaven than this.

God the Holy Spirit tells us that “*we have this treasure in earthen vessels*” (2 Corinthians 4:7). The treasure we carry through the world as God’s servants is the Gospel of His grace, by which He communicates to chosen sinners all the blessings of grace and salvation in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14). But we who carry this treasure are only “*earthen vessels,*” broken clay pots, worthless and meaningless. We are nothing but sinners saved by grace, no more; but the treasure we carry, by which God is pleased to save His elect, is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Expected Fruit

*Third*, at the appointed season, the Lord God looks for and rightfully expects to find fruit from the husbandmen of His vineyard (v. 10). The rent He requires of us is very reasonable. All He demands from us is that we reverence His Son (v. 13). God simply requires that we worship His Son.

Read verses 10-14 carefully. Here we see that as men and women deal with and treat Gods faithful servants, so they deal with and treat God’s Son.

“And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent *him* away empty. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated *him* shamefully, and sent *him* away empty. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast *him* out. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence *him* when they see him. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves,

saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.”

## Religion Loved and Christ Hated

Lost religious men and women love religion, religious duties, religious activity, religious ceremonies, religious history, and religious tradition, but utterly despise God, His Son, and His Gospel, and would (if they could) cast God’s Son off His throne, out of His Kingdom, and kill him. — *“They reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours”* (v. 14). That is exactly what was prophesied in Psalm 2.

The reason preachers, teachers, churches, and religious leaders despise and cast Christ and His Word out is simply this: — They want the vineyard for themselves.

## Conviction Not Conversion

Learn this too: — There are many who experience conviction who are never converted (v. 19).

“And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them.”

It takes something more than a guilty, condemning conscience to produce repentance and faith in the heart. That is the gift of God’s saving goodness and grace (Romans 2:4; Ephesians 2:8-9; Zechariah 12:10). *“The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.”*

## Despised Mercy

Our Lord here warns us that mercy despised will be taken away (vv. 15-16). If we despise the privileges and opportunities God

has given us, He will both take away those great privileges and make those things which might have been the means of our everlasting salvation the very basis of our everlasting ruin.

Present privileges are no guarantee of future privileges. The Lord Jesus warns us that he will remove the candlestick that is despised. If the preaching of the Gospel is not a savor of life, it will be to you a savor of death.

The time came when the cup of Israel's iniquity was full and God would tolerate them no more. In 70AD, just 40 years after this parable was uttered, God sent Titus and the armies of Rome into Jerusalem to destroy the holy city, the temple, and the nation. From that day to this, the Jews have been scattered over the face of the whole earth.

Nothing offends God like the neglect of His Gospel and His grace. The churches of Asia Minor, once so strong, are now gone. Africa, once the cradle of light, is now the house of darkness. England, once so full of light and life, is now a graveyard of religious relics and memories. Much, much has been given to us; and much shall be required of us.

John Trapp said, "The Gospel is that inheritance we received from our forefathers. It must be our care to transmit the same to our posterity." Truth is the legacy we have received from the preceding generations of God's saints, and truth is the legacy we must leave to the generations that follow. And that particular body of truth which we are responsible to maintain is the Gospel of Christ. Our creed is, and ever must be, "*Jesus Christ and him crucified.*" The truth we must preserve and declare is the great "*mystery of godliness,*" redemption by Jesus Christ, the incarnate God.

## God's Purpose Sure

Though many do despise God's grace, and thus heap destruction upon themselves, when He takes the Gospel from one people, He gives it to another, and the purpose of God is not thwarted or even hindered. Christ is still exalted and His people shall be

saved (vv. 17-18; Romans 11:25-26, 33-36).

Many reject and despise God's salvation, refusing to build upon the foundation He has laid; but Christ is still exalted. Though many refuse to believe the Gospel and are cast off for their unbelief, God has not cast off His people. There is yet a remnant according to the election of grace; and that remnant shall be saved (Romans 11:1-5). God's purpose is not hindered by man's unbelief (Romans 3:3-4).

## The Only Way

The only way a sinner can ever be saved is to fall on that Rock of Salvation which God has laid in Zion, Christ Jesus. — "*Whosoever shall fall on that Stone shall be broken*" (v. 18). If Christ falls on you in judgment, He will grind you to powder, and your everlasting ruin beneath the weight of this Stone will be inescapable and complete. "*On whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder*" (v. 18).

"Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that ledest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest *between* the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasse stir up thy strength, and come *and* save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure. Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves. Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst *room* before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof *were like* the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river. Why hast thou *then* broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by

the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it. Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch *that* thou madest strong for thyself. *It is* burned with fire, *it is* cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man *whom* thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved." (Psalm 80:1-19)

# Chapter 118

## Of God and Caesar

### Luke 20:19-26

“And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them. And they watched [him], and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor. And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person [of any], but teachest the way of God truly: Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar’s. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s. And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace” (Luke 20:19-26).

### **Momentary Conviction**

The *first* thing that strikes me in this passage is the alarming fact that men and women who ultimately perish under the wrath of God often have fleeting moments of what might be called conviction by the Word of God. As soon as our Lord declared the

impending wrath and judgment of God that was upon them, the Jews were pricked in their consciences because they knew their guilt (v 16); but they quickly overcame that sense of guilt.

This ought to be alarming. As with these lost, self-righteous, religious men, there are moments in the lives of unregenerate men and women, when they are pricked in their consciences by the law of God and compelled to acknowledge their guilt. But legal fear, the fear of divine judgment is not, in itself Holy Spirit conviction. Legal fear soon passes, as it did with these men.

Holy Spirit conviction is conviction that cannot be resisted and never passes. Holy Spirit conviction only increases. It never fades. Holy Spirit conviction is conviction that involves more than a sense of guilt and the terror of hell, though that certainly is a part of it. Holy Spirit conviction arises not from the terror of the law, but from the good news of the Gospel. Holy Spirit conviction is the conviction of God-given faith wrought in the heart by the revelation of Christ in us (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1; John 16:8-11).

## Our Merciful Savior

Read verses 17 and 18, and adore our great, gracious, and merciful Savior.

“And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

What a delightful picture! As soon as our Savior heard their cry of anguish and fear, He looked upon them in tenderness, pointed them to the Scriptures with which they were very familiar, declaring that the Christ of Whom they read in the Book of God every sabbath day has come. And looking forward to the day when it would be finished before their eyes, He announced that His work was accomplished. — *“The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?”*

Then, our merciful Redeemer called upon these men to fall upon Him in true repentance and be broken, saying, "*Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken.*"

He has become the Head of the Corner, God has highly exalted him to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins to poor, needy sinners, because He has finished His work. Fall on Him, and you shall be broken in repentance. Fall on Him, and you shall be lifted in forgiveness.

In the same breath, our Savior warned those men that if they persisted in their self-righteousness and unbelief, He would surely fall on them in His wrath and grind them to powder. — "*Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*"

Flying in the teeth of mercy, these men hardened their hearts, like Pharaoh of old, and refused to trust the Savior. They refused to fall on Him in faith, choosing death rather than life. With the Word of God in their hands and the Son of God standing before them, they stood firm as enemies of God's Christ in their hearts. What aggravated condemnation they stirred against themselves! Oh, may God the Holy Spirit save you and me from such folly and graciously force us now and continually, by His irresistible mercy, to fall on Christ!

## Enraged Religionists

In verses 19 and 20 we see how utterly enraged self-righteous religionists become when confronted with the claims of Christ.

"And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them. And they watched *him*, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor."

The claims of Christ will either break you or harden you. When you are confronted with the Gospel of God's free, saving

grace in Christ, you will either be broken in repentance or hardened in self-righteousness. You cannot hear the Gospel and be neutral. You will either take sides with God against yourself, or you will take sides with yourself against God. These proud, self-righteous religious men, enraged by the word of the sovereign Christ, words by which they had been exposed to themselves, decided it was time to kill Him.

The old proverb goes, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” But the fury of a woman scorned is a sweet consolation compared to the rage of men whose righteousness is scorned by God!

The Gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ is always offensive to lost religious people. That is the way it was then; and that is the way it is now. The offense of the cross has not ceased (Galatians 5:11). Divine sovereignty puts us all entirely in God’s hands. That offends man’s pride. Total depravity declares man to be basically evil, not good. That offends man’s righteousness. Unconditional election makes salvation a matter wholly determined by the immutable will of God. That offends man’s most treasured god — his will! Limited atonement makes salvation to be merited by and secured by Christ alone. That offends man’s high esteem of his own works. Irresistible grace makes the new birth, repentance, and faith the works and gifts of God the Holy Spirit. That offends man’s arrogant sense of power, his high sense of personal divinity. Perseverance of the saints makes salvation, grace, and eternal life entirely dependent upon the work of God. That offends man’s love of his own righteousness.

## Flattering Enemies

Those who are our most bitter foes often come against us as a flattering friends rather than enraged enemies. In verse 20 we read that the chief priests and scribes sent out spies who “*feigned themselves just men,*” who pretended to be honest and sincere. But their purpose was to entrap the Lord Jesus and find a pretentious excuse for having Him executed by the Roman

government. We read their flattering speech in verse 21. — “*And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly.*”

What these men stated was completely true, and they knew it was true; but they hated Him and His doctrine. They acknowledged that what He had just said concerning Himself and them was right. They asserted that our Savior is not blinded by the outward appearance of men. And they asserted that He taught the things of God truthfully.

It is not at all unusual for liars to speak truth with lying hearts. Their words sounded good and admiring. An ignorant bystander might have thought, “These men are sincerely interested in truth.” But their words were nothing but an outward covering for inward hatred. They were wolves who put on the sheep’s clothing for convenience, under the insane notion of deceiving the Lord of Glory. As the Psalmist put it, their “*words were smoother than butter, but war was in their heart.*” Their “*words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords*” (Psalm 55:21).

If you are wise, you will pay no attention to flattering tongues. Many have been ruined by the world’s seductive kindness, who stood strong and firm against the world’s persecutions (Psalms 12:2; 26:28).

Sweet things cause more sickness than bitter things. The warm, balmy sunshine of a bright summer day is far more likely to make a man shed his protective armor than the freezing blasts of winter. The devil is never so dangerous as when he appears to be our friend. And the world is never so dangerous to our souls as when it smiles and flatters.

There is never a lack of people who profess with their lips to love Christ, while in heart they deny Him. There are always some, who “*by good words and fair speeches,*” will attempt to deceive. God’s servants in every age and in every place have to deal with men like Diotrefes (Romans 16:18; Proverbs 26:23). Mark such men and avoid them. Do not indulge them.

## Overruling Providence

I cannot fail to show you once more the sweet consolation of God's overruling providence. These enraged, self-righteous, religious men pursued their lust with eagerness. They wanted to have the Lord of Glory executed with haste. The Holy Spirit tells us that it was "*the same hour.*" Yet, the Scriptures teach us that every minute circumstance which attended the crucifixion and death of our blessed Redeemer was performed precisely according to the will of God, according to His own, sovereign, eternal purpose of grace, to accomplish our salvation by the sacrifice of His darling Son (Isaiah 53:10; John 19:10-11; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).

## God and Caesar

In verses 22-26 as our Master, our Lord, and King, and Savior answers the question of these hypocrites concerning paying taxes to Caesar, He teaches us that in all matters of civil law, it is our duty to be obedient to civil government.

"Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Show me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's. And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace."

The attempt of these men in the instance here mentioned, was for the purpose of bringing an accusation against the Lord Jesus to the Roman government. The Jews at that time were under bondage to Rome; and they utterly hated Caesar and the Romans. The whole nation was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, whom they thought would deliver them from their modern-day Babylonian Captivity.

Yet, in their hatred of the Messiah whom they claimed to love, they hatched their crafty scheme to entrap Him. No matter how the Savior answered, they were sure they would snare Him with His words. If He confessed the authority of the Roman government, they thought He would lose His popularity among the people, whom they feared. If He denied the Romans' right to tribute, they would have hurriedly taken Him before Pontius Pilate, to have Him condemned. These are the men spoken of prophetically in Psalm 22:12. — "*Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.*"

Our blessed Savior not only foiled their craftiness, He seized the opportunity to teach us what our attitude ought to always be toward civil government. The Holy Spirit gives us the commentary on His words in Romans 13:1-7.

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore *ye* must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."

I do not approve of many things, indeed, of most things promoted and encouraged by the institutions of government in our country (the USA). I am thankful for the nation, love it, and am willing to fight to the death to defend the land and liberty God has given us. But those laws of the land that tend to destroy the

very fabric of society, I do not and cannot condone.

However, wherever the laws of the land do not demand that I violate the Word of God, I am and must be obedient to the laws of civil government. We must be obedient to God, regardless of cost or consequence, even when law forbids our obedience (Acts 4:18-20). But, where Caesar does not demand disobedience to Christ, we must render unto Caesar the things that are his.

This is something that I think about and pray about a good bit, as I am sure you do, particularly as we see the current trend of legislation, promoting promiscuity of every imaginable measure: homosexuality, fornication, and adultery, abortion (a pretty word for murdering babies) and euthanasia (the murder of people considered no longer fit to live). What are our responsibilities as believers toward civil government? Our divinely ordained responsibility to our government can be summarized in three words: pay, pray, and obey!

**Pay** — It has been said, “Only two things are sure: death and taxes; and of the two, taxes is the more painful.” There are many who for various reasons, usually religious fanaticism, consider it their duty not to pay taxes. The IRS takes a slightly different view of the matter. Even though the tax code talks about “voluntary compliance,” I personally know some who have wound up in prison because they chose not to pay their taxes. But our concern, our only concern as believers is this: — What does God have to say to us about paying taxes to our government? — *“Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.”*

Someone might say, “But Caesar and the Romans were not like our governmental leaders or our country.” And you are right. Caesar and the Romans were indescribably more abominably wicked (Read Romans 1). Idolatry was rampant among the Romans and promoted by the Roman government. Caesar demanded that men worship him as a god. Abortion was as commonplace as breakfast. Immorality of every imaginable variety was considered morality, and opposition to it was considered treasonous hatred

**Pray** — Not only are we to pay our lawful taxes, (I mean by that taxes required by law, not taxes we consider lawful!), our God teaches us to pray for Caesar. In giving instructions for the local church to the young pastor Timothy, Paul wrote...

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. (3) For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.” (1 Timothy 2:1-3)

“*Prayers*” are addresses made to our God in the name of Christ. The word “*supplications*” has the idea of praying for God to meet the need of another. “*Intercessions*” are prayers offered with compassion. “*Giving of thanks*” is the expressed gratitude to God for His good providence in giving us the civil leaders He has ordained as “*ministers of God to*” us. We have precisely the rulers we have because God has made them our rulers to minister to us; and they always minister to us, according to the will of our God, even godless, pagan kings (Ezra 7:27; Proverbs 16:1; 21:1).

The Spirit of God tells us that “*supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving and thanks*” are to be made for “*all men,*” and particularly “*for kings and for all who are in authority.*” That means that we are, as believers, to pray for our President, for members of Congress and the Supreme Court, for the governor, for our state senators and assemblymen, for our mayor and council members, irrespective of our opinion of these men and women. They need our prayers.

And, what is more, we need to pray for them. We would be far more useful to our nation if we spent more thought, time, and energy praying for our civil rulers than we do complaining about them.

**Obey** — Paul said, “*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.*” — Remember, Paul was living under a very oppressive government, the very government that

executed of our Lord Jesus Christ, the same government that would arrest, torture, and kill untold thousands of His followers. Yet the word from the Lord is very clear: we are to be subject to the governing authorities. We are to obey the laws of the land, for government has been established by God to keep order. In general, it is the lawbreakers, not the law-abiders, who have reason to fear the government. We may find much about the government at every level with which we take issue, but without the government, there would be chaos. Therefore, we are to obey. That is the rule, obey the government.

## Exceptions

But I would remind you of your school days and what you learned from English grammar. There are rules and there are exceptions to most rules. We learned “i before e except after c.” Then we were told to memorize the exceptions. The exceptions do not negate the rules, but they modify them. Similarly, there are exceptions to the rule of obeying the government. There are times when disobedience is necessary because we answer to a higher authority. There are three obvious examples in Scripture.

1. In Daniel’s day, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship the king’s golden image, and were cast into the fiery furnace, because God’s people were ordered not to pray to their God.
2. Daniel, in violation of the law, worshipped the Lord God, refused to obey the king’s decree, and for that was thrown into the lion’s den.
3. In the Book of Acts we are told that believers were ordered not to teach the people in the name of Jesus. — *“Peter and the other apostles answered and said: We ought to obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29).

When any government orders God’s elect to do something that violates a clear command of God, we have no choice but to disobey and then be willing to suffer the consequences for Christ’s sake. But disobedience to government is the exception to the rule. We are not to disobey civil law just because we do not

like the laws imposed, or because we think they are ridiculous, or even because we are certain that they are base and vile, as many of our laws are at their core. As long as we are not required to disobey our God, we are to obey those who rule over us, supporting our government and praying for our nation. We who believe God ought to be the best citizens of the land.

Let me give you a good reason for this:. — We are citizens of another country and servants of another King (1 Peter 2:9-17). “*Render (therefore) to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.*” — Give Caesar your taxes and your respect. Give God your heart, your devotion, your faith, your confidence, your praise, your reverence, your life.

# Chapter 119

## “Children of the Resurrection”

Luke 20:27-38

“Then came to [him] certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him, Saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man’s brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children. And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also: and they left no children, and died. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife. And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him” (Luke 20:27-38).

In this portion of Scripture we have the Sadducees’ attempt to entrap our Lord Jesus. The Sadducees were the smallest but by far the most wealthy and influential of the Jewish sects. They were the aristocrats of Judaism, and for the most part controlled

the priesthood and the temple. Though that was the case, the Sadducees were not commonly respected by the people. They, supposing themselves to be smarter than God, denied the resurrection. They were the most liberal sect of the Jews. They were religious; but their religion was the religion of infidelity.

The Sadducees' religion was nothing more than a philosophical system of carnal reason with religious overtones. They did not believe in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, or eternity. They did not believe that heaven and hell are real. The Sadducees believed that when men and women die, they die like dogs, that the death of the body is the end of a person's existence. They used the Scriptures, taught the Scriptures, and professed to believe the Scriptures. As we see in the passage before us, they could even recite the Scriptures from memory. These were "smart" men, well-educated, and very knowledgeable. They were sure the Lord Jesus would be completely stumped by their pretentious question. But their religion was altogether a religion of infidelity; and they were completely stumped by the Master's answer.

Our Lord Jesus Christ graciously turned the quibbles of these infidels into an opportunity to teach us that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, and that all the children of God are "*the children of the resurrection.*" In this passage of Holy Scripture, as we consider the ludicrous question of the Sadducees and the answer our Master gave them, *four things* stand out as matters of great importance.

## Religious Infidelity

*First*, the Sadducees stand before us as glaring examples of religious infidelity. The vast majority of people in this world who profess the name of Christianity, including the most powerful and most influential religious leaders of it, are really only religious infidels. Their religion is a matter of convenience, not conviction. It is, for the most part, a religion, which holds the Word of God, the truth of God, the Gospel of God, the will of God, and the glory of God in utter contempt, just like these Sadducees.

The Sadducees laughed at the doctrine of the resurrection. They were simply too “smart,” too “educated,” too “enlightened” to believe such religious sentiments. The question they posed to the Lord Jesus illustrates both their hypocrisy and their arrogance. They hypocritically pretended to have reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ, calling Him “*Master*.” They pretended to reverence the Scriptures as the Word of God. And they pretended to have concern for heavenly, spiritual things.

These men presented their question as though it were a factual thing, as though they were really interested in knowing the answer. Any statistician will tell you that you would have a far greater chance of winning the lottery than of seven brothers marrying the same wife, after each had died, leaving the woman childless! The only thing these men were interested in was raising a question, which they were confident the Master could not answer.

We will be wise to mark the things recorded here and learn from them not to allow modern religious infidels to entrap us. When carping religious infidels want to argue with you, just ignore them. Give them plain statements of Scripture, and leave them alone. If you get into a hissing contest with a snake, you are going to lose. Such people always try to press difficult and abstruse points. They always act in dishonesty. And they deserve nothing but contempt.

In Mark 12:24 we read that our Lord Jesus plainly told this same group of men that they were totally ignorant both of the Scriptures and of the power of God. — “*And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?*” Spiritual ignorance and doctrinal error may always be traced to these two things: (1.) Ignorance of The Word of God, and (2.) ignorance of God’s Power. These men did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, because they did not know the teaching of Holy Scripture and knew nothing of the power of God.

I do not doubt for a moment that they knew the letter of the Scriptures. No doubt, they could quote huge passages from the Bible from memory. I do not doubt that they were very keenly

aware of the historic events and chronological order of things recorded in the Scriptures. They knew the history of Israel, and even knew what the prophecies of the Old Testament said. But they had absolutely no knowledge of the meaning and message of Holy Scripture. Their understanding was nothing but the understanding of carnal reason and religious tradition.

Do you understand the message of Holy Scripture? The Book of God is all about Christ. The message of Holy Scripture is the Gospel of Christ (Luke 24:27, 32, 44-45; John 5:39; 1 Peter 1:23-25). Spiritual knowledge is not merely doctrinal knowledge, creedal knowledge, logical knowledge, and factual knowledge. Spiritual knowledge is the revealed knowledge of a Person, and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ.

These silly men wanted to argue about the doctrine of the resurrection. But the resurrection is more than a doctrine. It is a person. Christ is the Resurrection (John 11:25). You cannot know the Person without knowing the doctrine; but you certainly can know the doctrine of Christ without knowing Christ Himself. Salvation involves more than doctrinal knowledge. Salvation is knowing Christ (John 17:3). Christ is the Resurrection and the Life of chosen sinners: representatively in redemption (Ephesians 2:4-6), experimentally in regeneration (John 5:25; Revelation 20:6; Colossians 3:1-3), and prospectively in the last day (Colossians 3:4).

The truth of God, the Gospel of His grace, is much more than doctrinal, historical facts. — The Gospel is a Person, the crucified Christ (John 14:6). Without question, this Person is revealed and made known to us and in us in the context of revealed, doctrinal truth. But life and salvation comes by knowing the Triune God Himself in the Person of our all glorious Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God (John 17:3; 2 Timothy 1:12). Salvation is not merely knowing about Christ. Salvation is knowing Christ as my God, my Surety, my Substitute, my King, my Priest, my Prophet, and my Savior!

Spiritual ignorance, doctrinal error, and heresy of every kind, according to our Savior's word, must be traced to ignorance of the power of God. I take that to mean three things. These three

things, you will find throughout the Scriptures, are what is meant by the power of God.

1. Spiritual ignorance arises from and must be traced to an utter ignorance of God's sovereignty, His absolute authority as God.
2. Spiritual ignorance arises from and must be traced to an utter ignorance of God's omnipotence, His almightiness as God.
3. Spiritual ignorance arises from and must be traced to an utter ignorance of God's Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:15-16).

These Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, because they were totally ignorant of God's sovereignty, His omnipotence, and His Gospel. All heresy, all spiritual ignorance must be attributed to these things.

All false religion, all free will, works religion denies the sovereignty of God's will and purpose in election and predestination, the omnipotence of His power and grace in redemption, regeneration, and effectual calling, and the power of the Gospel's good news of redemption accomplished by the blood of His dear Son. — The preaching of the gospel is "*the power of God unto salvation*" (1 Corinthians 1:17-24).

## Worthiness for Heaven

In our Lord's answer to these carping infidels we find sweet and precious things for our souls.

"And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (vv. 34-36).

The first thing he tells us is that there are some people in this world who are "*accounted worthy to obtain*" the world to come.

It is written, “*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Corinthians 15:50). “*And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life*” (Revelation 21:27). Yet, our Lord Jesus asserts here, and the Word of God elsewhere declares, that there are some people in this world who are counted worthy to obtain the world to come (Colossians 1:12-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5).

Who are these people? What makes them worthy to obtain the world to come? These four things identify them; and these four things make them worthy of heavenly glory.

1. The Record Book of Heaven! — Their names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, written there from eternity as worthy (Romans 8:28-30).
2. The Redeemer’s Precious Blood! — The blood of Christ has freed them from all sin.
3. The Righteousness of God! — They are completely, perfectly and immutably righteous in Christ, made the very “*righteousness of God in Him.*”
4. The Regeneration of Grace! — Being born-again by God the Holy Spirit, they are made “*partakers of the divine nature.*” Christ is in them; and Christ in them is “*the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27).

Every year I travel to at least one foreign country preaching the Gospel of Christ. I have crossed the borders of our nation north, south, east, and west. Whenever I leave this country and cross into another, three things are required: (1.) I have to have a birth certificate to prove my citizenship. (2.) I have to have a visa from the country receiving me. And (3.) I have to have a clean record, no criminal record. Soon I will leave this land of sorrow and sin. I hope to enter into the bliss and glory of heaven. I hope to stand forever accepted as a citizen of the New Jerusalem. And this is the basis of my hope...

1. A Birth Certificate — The Lord God has given me a

new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17). There is in me a new man, created of God in righteousness and true holiness.

2. A Visa — I have a right to enter into heaven itself by the blood of Christ, because I am robed in His righteousness. God says, “*It must be perfect to be accepted,*” and in Christ I am perfect! He has made me perfectly righteous before God!

3. A Clear Record — Jesus Christ has purged away all my sins with His own precious blood. Therefore, God will never charge me with any sin (Romans 4:8). When I stand before God and He searches the books for iniquity and sin under my name, He will find none (Jeremiah 50:20).

Do you have what God requires? Are you worthy to obtain the world to come? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall obtain in Him all that God requires to make you worthy of heavenly glory!

## The Resurrection Life

Our Savior not only assures us of the resurrection, but also gives us a slight glimpse of what life shall be like in the resurrection glory awaiting us.

“And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (vv. 34-36).

There will be a resurrection of the dead. When our Lord Jesus comes again, there will be a resurrection of the just and of the unjust. This fact is inscribed upon every man’s heart and conscience by the finger of God in creation. Anyone who denies the resurrection is a liar. He lies against his own conscience. This doctrine of the resurrection is the doctrine of both the Old and New Testaments (Exodus 3:6; Job 19:25-26; Psalms 16:9-10;

49:15; 73:24; Hosea 6:1-2; Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; 1 Corinthians 15:35-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

In the resurrection God's saints shall be as the angels of God. In the resurrection we "*shall be equal unto the angels.*" What does that mean? I am certain that it contains a depth of meaning far greater than I have yet fathomed. But I am equally certain that it means these things.

1. In the resurrection we will be completely free of all carnal distinctions, weaknesses, cares, needs, and passions.

2. In the resurrection there will be no need for marriage and procreation, because there will be no more sickness, sorrow, bereavement or death! "*Neither can they die any more!*" — "*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power!*" And there will be no imperfection of love and unity among God's saints.

3. And in the resurrection we will, like the angels of God, possess the constant, full knowledge and assurance of God's approval. We will enjoy uninterrupted assurance of complete security with Christ. We will have perfect, uninterrupted communion with our Redeemer. Like the heavenly angels, we will always be engaged in the suitable, gratifying service of our great God. — Worshipping Him! — Singing His Praise! — Celebrating His Wondrous Works! — Doing His Will! We will have unbroken, everlasting rest! Like those celestial spirits above, we will gaze upon our God and Savior. "*They do always behold the face of God.*" "*They shall see his face!*" — "*As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness*" (Psalm 17:15).

He who is our God is the God of the living.

"Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the

bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him” (vv. 37-38).

Again, there is much more here than I can explain; but certain things are clear. It is certain that God’s saints who have left this world are not dead, but living. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob represent all God’s elect. They were chosen of God. They were heirs of a covenant. They believed God. They lived in communion with God. But they did not fully enjoy the fulfillment of God’s promises until they left this vale of tears (Hebrews 11:13-16). God’s glory was wrapped up in their lives. — *“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”* *“God is not ashamed to be called their God.”*

## The Word of God

Every time I read verse 37 I think to myself, “What a vast, immense Book the Word of God is!” The more I study it, the bigger it gets. This is a Book altogether beyond the reach of our puny brains. When we have studied it as deeply and as fully as possible, when we have taken in and comprehended everything that it is possible for us to take in and comprehend in this mortal frame, we will have only begun to scratch the surface. We will be learning the secrets of *“the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever”* throughout the endless ages of eternity.

Let me show you what I mean. The passage our Lord quotes in verse 37 is Exodus 3:6. — *“Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.”* — Who would ever have dreamed that this passage of Scripture has anything to do with the resurrection, if the Son of God Himself had not stated it? No one in history ever gave God’s word to Moses such an interpretation, until the Lord Jesus explained it in our text. Someone once wrote...

“The Bible is the Word of the living God; each letter was penned with an Almighty finger; each word came from the everlasting lips; each sentence was dictated by the Holy Spirit. Moses wrote with his fiery pen; God guided that pen. David played and sang the sweet psalms, but God moved his fingers over the strings and taught him the words. When Peter, James, and John tell of their Lord’s life, death, and resurrection, it is the voice of God, not a man’s voice. The very words are God’s words, — the words of the Eternal, the Invisible, the Almighty Jehovah. The Bible is God’s Word; and when I see it, I seem to hear a voice springing up from it saying, ‘I am the book of God; man, READ ME! I am God’s writing, open my pages, for I was written by God; He is my author and you will find Him manifested on every page.’”

Read the Book of God; and as you read it, pray that God the Holy Spirit, Who wrote it, will take the things of Christ in it and reveal them to you. Oh, what great, boundless, free, indescribable grace the Lord God has bestowed upon us in Christ, making us in him to be “*the children of God,*” “*the children of the resurrection,*” and “*accounted worthy to obtain that world!*” — “*One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple*” (Psalms 27:4).

# Chapter 120

## David's Son and David's Lord

Luke 20:39-47

“Then certain of the scribes answering said, Master, thou hast well said. And after that they durst not ask him any [question at all]. And he said unto them, How say they that Christ is David's son? And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son? Then in the audience of all the people he said unto his disciples, Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation” (Luke 20:39-47).

The Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees took great offense at our Lord's doctrine, rightly perceiving that He had spoken the parable of the vineyard (vv. 9-18) against them (v. 19). Taking offense at His doctrine, these wicked religious men, like their successors in every generation since, tried to catch the Lord Jesus with trick questions, hoping to twist His words and turn them against Him, all the while pretending to be sincere and honest. But they were altogether foiled in their schemes, as those who oppose Christ and His Gospel always are.

Once our Lord Jesus had stopped the mouths of the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, He seized the opportunity to give us a word of instruction about Himself and a word of warning about

religious pretense. The Scribes, who believed the doctrine of the resurrection, which the Sadducees denied, were pleased enough with the Lord's response to the Sadducees. But they no more believed God than the Sadducees or the Pharisees. All three groups were mere self-righteous religionists, who utterly despised Christ and salvation by Him. Our Lord saw through their charade. He was no more impressed with one than with the other.

## A Galling Exposure

*First*, our Lord Jesus publicly exposed the ignorance of these religious hypocrites. After enduring and silencing the cavils of His enemies, our Lord turned the table against them and deliberately exposed their utter ignorance of the Scriptures and the power of God. Remember, these were not ordinary men, or even ordinary religious men. They were the most revered religious leaders of their day. But they were, as are the most revered religious leaders of every age, ignorant of the Scriptures and ignorant of the power of God. Can you imagine how galling it must have been to them to have their ignorance publicly exposed before the multitudes? Yet, that is exactly what the Lord Jesus did here.

He asked them to explain an expression found in Psalm 110, where David speaks of the Messiah, whom they all acknowledged is David's son, as his Lord. They were dumfounded. They were so stunned that they could not give any kind of answer. These great religious leaders did not see the plain teaching of Holy Scripture that Messiah (the Christ), He who is our Redeemer and Savior, must be and is fully God and fully man in one glorious Person. Yet, that is exactly what the Psalmist David declares in Psalm 110. Their ignorance of this Psalm was exposed before all the people. Professing themselves to be teachers of others, claiming to possess the key of knowledge, they were totally ignorant of the Scriptures they claimed to teach with authority. Nothing could have been more embarrassing and galling.

## The Message of Scripture

*Second*, the Lord Jesus here reminds us that the Book of God is all about Him, his person, His work, His salvation, and His great glory in saving His people from their sins. I remind you again that the Bible is all about Christ. There is a unique fulness about the Word of God that gives clear evidence of its inspiration. The more we read and study it, the bigger it gets and the more it seems to contain. All other books become mundane, if they are repeatedly read. Their weak points become obvious. After a while, they all get old. But the Book of God just gets more fresh. It appears to be broader, deeper, and fuller the more fully it is studied. The fresh truths that constantly spring up before our eyes are simple, plain, and clear. The Book of God is an inexhaustible mine of spiritual treasure. Nothing can explain this, except the fact that the Bible is the Word, not of man, but of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21).

Yet, throughout the Bible, there is but one theme, one message.<sup>22</sup> The theme and message of this Book is Jesus Christ

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22 The perfect harmony and unity of the Bible is simply an unanswerable argument for its divine origin and a great source of comfort and assurance for our faith. If I should see my great-grandfather, who has been dead since I was a boy, rise up out of the earth, that fact would be less miraculous than the existence of God's Word. The Bible was written in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), by some forty different authors, who lived on two separate continents, over a period of more than sixteen hundred years. Parts of it were written in palaces, parts in prisons. Some of it was written by well educated men in great cities, other parts were written by shepherds and fishermen. Parts of it were written during times of war, pestilence, and danger, other parts during times of ecstatic joy. Those who wrote the words of Holy Scripture were from virtually every walk of life: judges, priests, kings, prophets, prime-ministers, herdsmen, scribes, fishermen, and soldiers. Yet, in spite of all these varying circumstances, conditions, workmen, and ages of time employed in the production of the Book, it stands as one Book. It is perfectly one in all its parts, free of error, and free of contradiction. "Imagine forty persons of different nationalities, possessing various degrees of musical culture, visiting the organ of some great cathedral and at long intervals of time, and without any collusion whatever, striking sixty-six different notes, which when combined yielded the theme of the grandest oratorio ever heard; would it not show that behind these forty different men there was one presiding mind,

and Him crucified, redemption and salvation by His blood (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; Acts 20:26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:2).

## The Psalms

We see this fact demonstrated throughout the Scriptures. This Book speaks of Him whom to know is life eternal. As we open the Word of God, let us pray that God the Holy Spirit, whose Word it is, will open our hearts and minds to see the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Psalms, to which our Lord here refers us, are full of Him. No part of the Bible perhaps is better known in the letter, and none so little understood in the spirit, as the Book of Psalms. That was true in our Lord's day; and the same is true today. Most everyone who attends church knows something about the Psalms. In some churches a psalm is sung every week. Some sing the Psalms exclusively. Yet, there are few who understand that the Psalms speak of Christ.

Most everyone acknowledges that some of the Psalms are messianic, that they have some reference to Christ. But few understand that all the Psalms speak of Him, as He declared in Luke 24 that they do. Yes, they record feelings, experiences, praises, and prayers of the men who wrote them; but we have not understood the Psalms at all, if we do not see that they all point us to and teach us about our Savior.

The Book of Psalms is, in a word, a book full of Christ — Christ's coming — Christ's sufferings — Christ in humiliation — Christ dying — Christ rising again — Christ coming the second time — Christ reigning over all. The Psalms speak of both

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one great Tone-Master? As we listen to some great orchestra, with its immense variety of instruments playing their different parts, but producing melody and harmony, we realize that at the back of these many musicians there is the personality and genius of the composer. And when we enter the halls of the Divine Academy and listen to the heavenly choirs singing the Song of Redemption, all in perfect accord and unison, we know that it is God Himself who has written the music and put this song into their mouths." — *A. W. Pink*

our Lord's great advents — the advent of humiliation, when He appeared to be made sin for us and to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself — and the advent of His glory, when He shall appear the second time without sin to gather His people home to glory. Both the kingdoms are here: the kingdom of grace, during which the elect are gathered, and the kingdom of glory, when every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord.

**We read the Word of God with no profit to our souls**, if we read only the letter of the written Word and fail to see the Person, the character, the accomplishments, the grace, the greatness, and the glory of Christ the living Word, of Whom the written Word speaks.

### Christ's Enthronement

*Third*, the Lord Jesus declares his eternal enthronement and dominion as the God-man, our Mediator.

“And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make thine enemies thy footstool” (vv. 42-43).

Did David say precisely that? Did he actually declare that the Lord Jesus Christ was already enthroned as our Mediator? Indeed, he did. But Christ's enthronement as our Mediator and Priest is the reward of His accomplished redemption. Is it not (Psalm 2:8; John 17:1-5; Philippians 2:5-11; Romans 14:9)? So how could He have been already enthroned, if He had not yet fully accomplished His work of redemption, if He had not yet fully saved His people? He was already enthroned because as the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, His work was accomplished and our salvation was finished before the world began.

Read Psalm 110 again. Carefully note that which the Holy Spirit, back in David's day asserted emphatically that Christ was already enthroned because His great salvation was finished long before He came into the world in time. In fact, this is exactly what Isaiah saw and experienced in Isaiah 6. The Lord Jesus

Christ, as our Mediator, was given the reins of universal dominion privately before the world began (John 17:5). He was given those reins publicly at His ascension. He holds those reins now, and shall hold them forever. The triune God has put all things into the hands of Christ, the God-man, our Redeemer. And He shall reign forever! Soon, all His enemies shall be (either by saving grace or by the execution of wrath) put under His feet (Isaiah 45:22-25; 1 Corinthians 15:24-25).

## The God-man

In verse 44 our Savior, speaking of Himself, asked these “brilliant,” religious idiots, — “*David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?*” They were dumbfounded by the question. Yet, it is a question that is easily and quickly answered by the poorest, most unlearned sinner saved by God’s free grace (John 1:14-18; 1 Timothy 3:16). How truly blessed we are, being taught of God, to know and be assured of this great mystery. Our great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is both the “*Root*” and the “*Offspring*” of David. Being God the eternal Son, one with the Father, over all God blessed forever, He is, and must be God: — David’s Root, and the Maker of all things. And as man He is the Offspring, which as a Branch, was promised to grow out of his roots (Isaiah 11:1).

Precious Savior! Blessed Redeemer! Were You not both David’s Son and David’s Lord, what would have become of us? But because You, O Blessed Son of God, became a man like us, that You might live and die and live again to save us, eternal life is ours by the merit and efficacy of Your righteousness and blood! The righteousness brought in by the obedience of the God-man is the righteousness of God (Romans 10:1-4). The blood shed for the atonement of sin is the blood of that Man who is Himself God (Acts 20:28). And it is this Christ, the God-man our Mediator and Savior, who is, who was, and who shall be forever our Priest upon His Throne, our King, Priest and Advocate, made after the order of Melchizedek! How safe we are! How secure! How peaceful and confident we ought to be!

## A Timeless Warning

*Fourth*, our Redeemer again warns us to beware of all who make a show of religion and godliness.

“Then in the audience of all the people he said unto his disciples, Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows’ houses, and for a show make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation”

This was an open, public rebuke of men who “*sat in Moses’ seat*,” and were the recognized and revered religious leaders of people. It seems that no sin is more obnoxious to the Son of God than hypocrisy and a show of religion. None drew forth from his lips such frequent, strong, and withering condemnation during the whole course of His earthly ministry. Our Savior is ever full of mercy and compassion for the chief of sinners. Fury was not in Him when He saw Zacchaeus, the penitent thief, Matthew the tax-collector, Saul the persecutor, and the woman in Simon’s house. But when He saw Scribes and Pharisees wearing a mere cloak of religion, and pretending great outward sanctity, piety, and holiness, while their hearts were full of wickedness, His holy soul was full of indignation. Eight times in one chapter (Matthew 23.) we find Him saying, “*Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*”

And He has not changed. He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Whatever else we are in religion, let us be true. However feeble our faith, hope, love, and obedience may be, let us be real, genuine, and sincere. It is not accidental that the very first piece of armor Paul recommends to the Christian soldier is “*truth*.” — “*Stand therefore*,” he says, “*having your loins girt about with truth*” (Ephesians 6:14).

Anyone who attempts, in any way, to show his religion, devotion, piety, sanctity, and holiness to others, truly does; and he has his reward. His religion, devotion, piety, sanctity, and holiness is all outward; and the applause of men is all it is worth.

God's saints seek not the praise of men, but the praise of God.

## Degrees of Torment

*Fifth*, we are taught that there are degrees of damnation in hell. Our Savior's last word in this instructive chapter is a word about the greater condemnation of self-righteous religionists. — "*The same shall receive greater damnation.*"

There are no degrees of glory in heaven, because salvation is by the grace of God alone. Heaven's glory was earned for all God's elect; and we are made worthy of it by Christ's obedience and death as our Substitute. But there are degrees of damnation in hell. The everlasting torments of the damned in hell are measured out and executed by divine justice according to the measure of man's wickedness.

Do not read these solemn words and forget them. They are spoken to lost religious men. Terrible as the case of all the damned shall be (Who can imagine the horrid torments of everlasting damnation in hell?), yet the greater damnation will be on those who, because they imagine themselves righteous, trample under foot the blood of Christ and despise the grace of God, "*Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.*" (Isa. 65:5).

Do not be so proud. Do not be so foolish. Oh, may God the Holy Spirit give you grace now to look to Christ, to believe Him. There is a Fountain opened for sinners; but there is nothing but everlasting damnation in hell for those who think they are righteous. O sinner, plunge into that Fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins. Sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains!

# Chapter 121

## Lessons for Troublesome Times

### Luke 21:1-24

“And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had. And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, *As for* these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign *will there be* when these things shall come to pass? And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am *Christ*; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them. But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end *is* not by and by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name’s sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony.

Settle *it* therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and *some* of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls. And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:1-24).

We are living in troublesome times. These are perilous days. These are difficult days for everyone. But they are particularly difficult for people who believe God and seek, in all things and above all things, to honor Him. I know that your minds are constantly full of questions, for which there seems to be no answer. Moral decadence, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and the pedophilia that it spawns are not just tolerated, but actively promoted in our public schools and by law. The brutal slaughter of unborn babies is as common as the removal of warts. By some perverse logic, the same people who want to protect rattle snakes from extinction and weep over the misuse of laboratory rats tell us that the murder of a baby is a matter of choice! Domestic violence is epidemic. War is an everyday activity. And the religion of the day is nothing short of men worshipping themselves. When I think about these things, three passages of Scripture come to my mind (Deuteronomy 31:17;

Psalms 10:4; Galatians 6:7).

“Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and 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?” (Deuteronomy 31:17)

“The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek *after God*: God *is* not in all his thoughts.” (Psalms 10:4)

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” (Galatians 6:7)

How do we deal with these things? How are we to react to the things going on around us every day? Where are we to find help for our souls in these perilous times? In the first 24 verses of Luke 21 our blessed Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, gives us some needed lessons for troublesome times. Let’s look at them together.

## Christ Sees All

Here is the first lesson. — Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, He with whom we have to do, sees all and knows all.

“And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.” (Luke 21:1-4)

How keenly our Lord Jesus Christ observes the things that are done upon earth. We read that “*He looked up and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.*”

It would seem reasonable to me that our Lord's mind would have been on other things. His betrayal, His unjust arrest, His mock trial, His crucifixion, His sufferings, and His death, were all at hand; and He knew it. The destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, and the casting away of Israel, the long period of this Gospel age, "*until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled,*" and His glorious second advent were all spread before His mind like a great picture. Yet, He took notice of "*the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.*"

Truly, He sees all and knows all. — "*Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do*" (Hebrews 4:13). — "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place*" (Proverbs 15:3). Nothing escapes His observation. Every act and thought of every person is written down in the book of His remembrance. The same eye that sees the council-chambers of the mighty observes all that goes on in your house and mine. He observed the pompous show of these rich men. And He observed the great sacrifice of the poor widow. He observed not only what they did, but also why.

Yes, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, He with whom we have to do, sees all and knows all! To religious hypocrites, that fact is terrifying, and ought to be. To the believer, it is blessedly comforting (John 21:17).

## Marked for Destruction

Here is the second lesson. — Everything on this earth is marked for destruction.

"And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, *As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down*" (Luke 21:5-6).

These words were a striking prophecy. How strange and

startling they must have sounded to those who heard them. The temple at Jerusalem was utterly destroyed just a few years after these words were spoken. Soon, all earthly buildings and all earthly things, no matter how firm they appear to be, no matter how much they are prized and treasured by us, shall melt with a fervent heat and be destroyed. Hold nothing here with a firm hand. Value nothing on this earth more than you will value it when you die (2 Corinthians 4:17-5:9).

Our Lord was talking about the temple of God. It was a fabulous piece of architecture. To the Jews, the thought of it being destroyed was incomprehensible. They looked upon that building with idolatrous veneration. It was built according to the pattern given by God himself. David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Nehemiah were the venerated names associated with that building. Every devout Jew in every corner of the world prayed toward the temple daily.

But the temple was to be destroyed by the hand of God. The temple at Jerusalem, though once the place of God's manifest glory, though once the place where God met with men, though once the place where men and women drew near to and worshipped the triune God, had become an empty shell, a den of thieves, and a synagogue of Satan. That which was once the house of God had become the brothel of Babylon, and must be destroyed. So it shall be with every local church, every form of religion, and every person who abandons the Gospel of Christ and the worship of God. When Babylon falls, all who sleep in her bed shall fall with her. When the world is ablaze with Divine judgment, all false religion shall be burned as wood, hay, and stubble.

The true temple of God is not a building, or a system of religion, but the broken and contrite heart of poor sinners trusting his Son (John 4:23-24; Philippians 3:3).

## False Christs

“And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign *will there be* when these

things shall come to pass? And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am *Christ*; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them” (Luke 21:7-8).

Everyone wants to know when the end of the world will be, when Christ shall come again, and when the great Day of Judgment shall come. But our Lord Jesus completely passes over the questions asked in verse seven, because all such questions are totally unimportant. They are questions to which no answer can be found, because God has hidden the answer. Our Master refused to indulge their vain curiosity about prophecy. We would be wise to do the same.

Instead, he addressed Himself to a matter that ought to be of great concern to us all. Here is the third lesson. — Many false Christs are in the world, by whom multitudes are deceived. I am not interested in the many men who appeared in the years following our Lord’s crucifixion who claimed to be the Christ. They are of no danger to us today. But there are many false Christs being preached in the name of the true, just as there were in the days of the Apostles (2 Corinthians 11:3-4; Galatians 1:6-9; 1 John 4:1-3). Of these false Christs, we must beware.

I urge you to give earnest heed to the words of the Son of God.

“Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many...For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:4-5, 21-24).

The plain fact is there are many false Christs, many

antichrists, by whom the souls of men are deceived and damned. I want to be as charitable, kind, and gracious as I can; but charity, kindness, and grace will not allow me to be silent while immortal souls are deceived and God's glory is trampled beneath the feet of men. If you trust a false Christ, you cannot be saved any more than you could be saved by trusting a tadpole. We are called of God to trust, love, follow, and obey the true Christ and Him only. Salvation is promised to none but those who trust the true Christ. Therefore, we are warned in our text to "*Take heed that no man deceive you.*" We must take heed to the teachings of Holy Scripture, lest we be deceived by some false Christ.

We know about the Christ of the liberals. He was a social do-gooder. "Of course," we are told, "he is not God." The virgin birth, the incarnation, the resurrection are all things that must be understood allegorically. In fact, the Christ of the liberals is considered by many to be a man of very questionable moral character. Any who are deceived by liberal theology and the Christ of the liberals are willingly deceived. We are not deceived by the Christ of the liberals. Only a prating fool would pretend to be a Christian while teaching what liberals do concerning Christ. The Christ of the liberals is a false Christ. All who trust the Christ of the liberals are lost.

We also know about the Christ of the various cults. He is represented to us as a good man, a prophet, a teacher of morality, the first and greatest creation of God, or even a sort of secondary god. But the Christ of the cults is never represented as the true and eternal God. Their Christ receives his existence from another god, one who is greater than he is. This, of course, is not the Christ of the Bible. We are not deceived by him. The Christ of the cults is a false Christ. All who trust the Christ of the cults are lost.

We know about the Christ of Roman Catholicism. The papists profess that Jesus Christ is God, that he came into the world as a man, that he suffered the wrath of God as a substitute for sinners, that he died, was buried, rose again the third day, ascended back to heaven, and that he is coming again. But the Christ of Romanism is not a complete Savior. The Christ of Rome cannot

save sinners without their own good works, the intercessions of priests, and the sacraments of the church. The Christ of Rome is not the Christ of the Bible. We are not deceived by him. Though many are damned by the darkness of Roman Catholic idolatry, that is not a danger and deception by which any who read these lines are likely to be deceived. The Christ of the papists, we know, is a false Christ. All who trust the Christ of Rome are lost.

However, there is a false Christ much more dangerous than the antichrists of the liberals, the cults, and the papists. There is a false Christ by whom the souls of men have been deceived for years, by whom millions are being deceived today. In fact, I am compelled to say, the vast majority of those who profess faith in Christ are followers of this false Christ who will ultimately lead them to eternal ruin. This Christ, this antichrist is such a dangerous and deceptive Christ, that our Lord tells us he would deceive the very elect were it not impossible for God's elect to be deceived (Matthew 24:24). He must be identified. The Christ I speak of is the Christ of Arminian, freewill, works religion.

Few think that I am uncharitable when I denounce the false Christs of liberals, cults, and papists as antichrists, and warn men that following those false Christs will result in everlasting damnation. Yet, whenever I boldly assert that the Christ of Arminian, freewill, works religion is a false Christ and that all who trust him are lost, I am castigated as an evil man. Be that as it may, as a watchman upon the walls of Zion, I am responsible to warn you of the danger of this antichrist.

The Christ of Arminian, freewill, works religion is extremely dangerous, because in many ways he appears to be the true Christ. The freewillers and workmongers of this age tell us that Christ is the true God, in every way equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. They even assert that he saves by grace alone, without the works of man. They insist vehemently that good works play no part in their salvation. The devotees of this Christ will have nothing to do with the Christ of the liberals, the cults, or the papists. But *“take heed that no man deceive you!”* Do not be fooled. The Christ of Arminian, freewill, works religion is not the Christ of the Bible. He is a false Christ. All who trust this

false Christ are lost, too.

Be sure you understand the issue. The issue is not what or how much does a person have to know to be saved. The issue is who. Who must I know? The answer to that question is plainly stated in John 17:3. We must know the true God and the true Christ. Let me make five comparisons of the false Christ of modern religion, the Christ of Arminian, freewill, works religion, with the Christ of the Bible. When you have considered these five comparisons in the light of Holy Scripture, I have no doubt that you will see the obvious distinctions between the false Christs and the true.

*1. The Christ of modern, freewill, works religion loves everyone in the universe and wants to save them.*

We are told that Christ loves all men alike, desires the salvation of all men alike, and is gracious to all men alike. That makes the love, will, and grace of Christ helpless and useless. But that language cannot be applied to the Christ of the Bible. The true Christ, the Christ of the Bible, the saving Christ loves His people, wills and prays for the salvation of His people, and is gracious to His people, the people unconditionally chosen unto salvation from eternity, whom He came to save (Psalms 5:5; 7:11; 11:5; Matthew 1:21; 11:27; John 10:16; John 17:9-10; Acts 13:48; Romans 9:21-24; Ephesians 1:3-6).

*2. The Christ of modern, freewill, works religion tries to save everyone.*

We are told that he offers salvation to every sinner and does everything he can to save them all; but that his offer is rejected and his work is frustrated by the will of those who refuse to come to him and be saved. The Christ of the Bible does not merely offer salvation. He performs it! Grace is not an offer. It is an operation! The Son of God effectually calls to Himself all His elect, His sheep, and sovereignly works salvation in them by the irresistible power and grace of His Holy Spirit. Not one of them will be lost. Is this, or is it not the teaching of Holy Scripture?

(Psalms 65:4; 110:3; Isaiah 55:11; John 5:21; 6:37-40; 10:3, 25-30; 17:2; Philippians 2:13)

*3. The false Christ of Arminianism cannot regenerate and save anyone who does not first choose to be saved by him.*

We are told that man has a freewill, but that Christ's will is bound by and must wait upon man's will, because it would not be right for him to violate man's will! The true, saving Christ does violate man's imaginary freewill; and I am very thankful that he does. Had he not violated my freewill, I would be lost or in hell now! The same is true of you. He sovereignly regenerates and saves every chosen, redeemed sinner. His operations of grace are totally independent of the will and choice of the sinner. Apart from His work of grace in us, spiritually dead sinners never would or could believe on Him and come to Him in faith. Faith is not our contribution to the work of salvation. Our faith in Christ is the result, not the cause of God's saving operations. "*Let God be true, but every man a liar*" (John 3:3-7; 6:44, 65; 15:16; Acts 11:18; Romans 2:4; 9:16; Ephesians 2:1-4, 8-10; Philippians 1:6, 29; Colossians 2:12; Hebrews 12:2).

*4. The false Christ of modern, Arminian, freewill, works, man-centered religion died on the cross for everyone in the world, to make it possible for everyone in the world to be saved, but actually secured no one's salvation by his death.*

We are told that Christ by his death made it possible for all men to be redeemed, justified, and saved, but that his death has no efficacy and saving power for anyone until they believe on him. Thus, we are informed that the Son of God died in vain for all who perish in unbelief. Though he tried to save them, he failed! The Christ of God is not a frustrated failure! He died for God's elect and effectually put away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. Having satisfied the justice of God for us, He obtained

eternal salvation for us. We were and are forever pardoned, justified, and sanctified by His blood (Isaiah 42:4; 53:8; Matthew 20:28; John 10:14-15, 26; Acts 20:28; Romans 5:9-10; Ephesians 5:25; Hebrews 9:12; 10:10-14; 1 Peter 3:18; Revelation 5:9-10).

*5. The false Christ of Arminianism loses many who have been saved by him because they do not hang on, hold out, or persevere to the end.*

Among the heretical Baptists of our day, some do grant that the sinner has what has come to be called “eternal security.” But it is not security based upon the will, work, and purpose of God in Christ. It is not security based upon the blood of Christ, or the operations of his Spirit. According to the freewill, all these things are done for all people alike. So their doctrine of “eternal security” is a declaration of security based upon the choice and will of man, not the choice and will of God. The true Christ, the saving Christ, the Christ of the Bible preserves His chosen, redeemed, called ones by His almighty grace, so that they cannot fall away and perish at last. We are kept in life, grace, and faith by the immutability of His will, the power of His blood, the efficacy of His grace, the seal of His Spirit, and the perfection of His intercession (Malachi 3:6; John 5:24; 10:26-29; Romans 8:28-39; 1 Peter 1:2-5; Jude 24-25).

At first glance, the Christ of modern, Arminian, freewill, works religion may seem to closely resemble the true Christ, the Christ of Scripture; but he does not. The one is a false Christ, antichrist. The other is true, the Christ of God. One is weak and helpless, waiting upon and bowing to the will of man. The other is the sovereign Lord, Who wills what He pleases and does what He will! The one is supposed to be able to save with your cooperation. The other is able to save without any cooperation on your part. His salvation produces your cooperation!

Those who believe on and serve the false Christ of freewill, works religion do not believe on and serve the Christ of the Bible. They are deceived. They are lost. And they shall forever perish under the wrath of God, unless they come to know and

trust the Christ of God, who saves His people from their sins by Himself. We must, as we fear God and care for the souls of men, have no fellowship with and give no credibility to Arminian, freewill, works religion (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Revelation 18:4). We must, in these days of darkness, deception, and delusion, proclaim the Christ of God in all His saving fullness, grace, and glory. He alone is able to save (Romans 1:15-17). Let us ever adore, praise, and extol the Lord Jesus Christ alone and completely as our great Savior (Isaiah 59:16)

## By and By

Here is the fourth lesson. — The Lord Jesus will appear when it's time, as he puts it in verse 9, "*by and by.*"

“But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end *is* not by and by.” (Luke 21:9)

We are to watch and look for Him to come at any moment. Expect Him to appear, and to appear soon. Yet, we must never begin to think the time of the end is immediately at hand. We are to watch for Him with anxious, hopeful expectation, on the tiptoe of faith. Yet, we are to patiently wait for Him, serving Him with diligence and perseverance, with an eye to the generation before us and to the future generations that may be influenced by us.

## Troubles Sure

Here is the fifth lesson. — Until Christ returns, troubles are sure and will only increase, troubles in the world and persecutions against the Gospel and all who worship and faithfully serve the Lord Jesus.

“Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on

you, and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake." (Luke 21:10-12)

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." (Philippians 1:29)

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." (1 Peter 2:21-25)

## Confess Christ

Here is the sixth lesson. — Times of great trouble are times of great opportunity to confess Christ.

"But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle *it* therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." (Luke 21:12-15)

All these things, our Savior says, "*shall turn to you for a testimony.*" They supply us with great opportunity to confess Him before men, to proclaim to this wicked and perverse generation the glorious Gospel of God's free, saving grace in Christ.

And we are not left to come up with something to say. He has

in His Word given us the “*mouth and wisdom*” needed for the hour in which we live; and that “*mouth and wisdom*” is the Gospel. Let us settle it in our hearts that we will speak Christ’s Gospel in the day He has given us. The Gospel we preach, the grace of which we testify, our adversaries can neither “*gainsay nor resist,*” “*for the Word of God is not bound.*”

## Perfectly Safe

Here is the seventh lesson. — Though we may be betrayed, hated, persecuted, and sometimes even put to death, for Christ’s sake, God’s saints are always perfectly safe in His omnipotent hands, and shall never suffer any harm or injury of any kind.

“And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and *some* of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish.” (Luke 21:16-18)

It is written, “*There shall no evil happen to the just.*” — “*It shall be well with the righteous.*”

“*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*” (Hebrews 13:5-6)

## Patient Possessing

“In your patience possess ye your souls. And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to

them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:19-24)

Here is the eighth lesson in our text. — Our Lord Jesus teaches us, in the midst of troublesome times, “*In your patience possess ye your souls.*” Child of God, enjoy yourself, and enjoy your God and Savior. Let nothing disturb or distress you. You possess that peace and joy in your souls which the world cannot take away (Romans 5:3-5). And He tells us that we are to possess our souls in this patience of grace and faith and peace until all His elect have been gathered into His kingdom, “*until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*” (Romans 11:25-27).

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,

But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

## Chapter 122

# “Men’s Hearts Failing Them”

Luke 21:25-38

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, 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 at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and *so* that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called *the mount* of Olives. And all the people came early in the morning to him in

the temple, for to hear him” (Luke 21:25-38).

I am fully aware that these verses speak specifically of our Lord’s coming to destroy Jerusalem and Judaism when He sent the armies of Rome to destroy that city and its temple in 70 AD. Our Savior’s words in verse 32 make that crystal clear. — *“This generation (the generation then living) shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.”* But that does not mean that they have no meaning for us today. Everything recorded in this passage of Inspiration is written for our *“learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”* (Romans 15:4). Without question, all that we read here is to be properly applied to this day in which we look for *“the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior,”* the Lord Jesus Christ.

Historians tell us that the early saints used to greet one another with these words, “He is risen,” and upon parting they would say, “The Lord is coming.” Thus they constantly encouraged one another in the faith and constantly reminded one another of both the accomplishment of redemption by Christ and the certainty of resurrection glory with Christ.

Before He left this world, our Lord Jesus assured His disciples that, just as surely as He arose from the grave, He would come again to raise His saints from their graves and translate all His elect in resurrection glory to heaven. Let us ever rejoice in the blessed prospect of our Savior’s return. The Lord is coming (Revelation 1:7). I want, by the Spirit of God, to stir up your hearts and my own to ever be mindful of this fact: — The Lord is coming! May God give us grace ever to live on the tip-toe of faith in the blessed expectation of Christ’s glorious second advent. The Lord Jesus Christ is coming again.

### **The Glory of Christ’s Coming (vv. 25-27)**

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man

coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (vv. 25-27).

Our Savior begins this discourse by describing the time of His coming as a time of great fear, so great that men’s hearts will fail them. I do not know that this is the case, but if that is to be taken as a description of the days just before Christ returns, surely we may reasonably conclude that our “*redemption draweth nigh!*”

In Hebrews 9 the Holy Spirit tells us three things about our blessed Savior: (1.) The Son of God appeared once to put away our sins by the sacrifice of Himself (vv. 25-26). (2.) Our great Advocate and High Priest now appears in the presence of God for us, making intercession for His elect according to the will of God (v. 24; 1 John 2:1-2). And (3.) our great God and Savior shall, at the appointed time, appear again on this earth to consummate His great work of saving His people from their sins (vv. 27-28).

As our Savior describes His second advent in His Olivet discourse in our text, it is obvious that when He comes again, it will not be a secret thing. At His glorious second advent, He will appear with power and great glory. — “*There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*” That is the language of Holy Scripture. Christ’s second coming shall not be in some imaginary “secret rapture.” His shall be a glorious appearing (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 1:7).

The Lord Jesus speaks about the sun being turned into darkness, the moon refusing to give light, the falling of stars, and the shaking of powers in the heavens. Such language conveys the idea of a great, universal convulsion, a climatic dismantling of creation by the finger of God. The language He uses is very much the language Peter used to describe His coming (2 Peter 3:10).

In other words, that which shall immediately precede the glorious appearing of Christ will be the conflagration of the

universe. Without question, when that happens we will see, *“Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.”*

## Order of Events

The order of events at the second coming seems to be as follows. These things are not written in concrete. I would not argue in defense of them for even a second. However, this is what appears to me to be likely. I have formed this order by carefully comparing Scripture with Scripture. Whatever the order of events may indeed be, it will not take long to accomplish the whole thing. When the Son of God rises from His throne and says, *“Behold, I make all things new,”* it will all be done quickly.

1. Christ will come in the clouds of heaven.
2. He will raise up those bodies of His saints which sleep in the earth.
3. Those who are living in faith when He comes shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.
4. He will destroy the present creation and all His enemies with it, and make all things new.
5. Then we shall come with Him to the earth. We shall come with Him into a new heavens and a new earth.
6. Then will come the resurrection of the dead and the great white throne judgment.
7. After these things — ETERNAL LIFE WITH CHRIST!

Our Lord’s second advent will be radically different from His first. Our Savior came the first time in humiliation, an infant, born of a poor woman, laid in a manger at Bethlehem, unnoticed, unhonored, unknown. He is coming the second time in power and great glory, in royal dignity, with all the armies of heaven surrounding Him, to be seen, recognized, known, acknowledged and feared by all people, nations, tribes, and tongues.

Christ Jesus came the first time to suffer, to bear the sins of His people, to be made sin and made a curse, to be despised, rejected, unjustly condemned, and slain. He is coming the second

time as the reigning, almighty Monarch of the universe to put down every foe, put an end to all rebellion, to take possession of all the kingdoms of this world, to rule them in perfect righteousness, to judge the world, destroy His enemies, and to be eternally admired by redeemed sinners.

We would all be wise to lay these things to heart and meditate upon them regularly. These facts are filled with comfort for every believer. Our great King, our all glorious Christ, will soon be here again! We shall, with Him, inherit all things. We will soon exchange the cross for a crown. We shall enter into everlasting honor, joy, bliss, and life.

But, for you who believe not, the facts revealed in the Book of God about the second coming of Christ ought to be terrifying. Indeed, if you dare think upon them, I know, they are terrifying to your soul. Christ, Whom you despise, reject, and mock, will soon call you before His holy bar of judgment. That God-man, whose Gospel you trample beneath your feet, will soon hold you accountable. In that day, you shall receive of the Lord's hand your exact, just due for all your sins. Hell will be your everlasting portion!

Do you ask, "What is hell?" Everlasting Fire! Endless Misery! Everlasting, Indescribable Woe! Never Ending Wrath! Never Ending Torment! Everlasting Darkness! Everlasting Isolation! Everlasting Cursing! Everlasting Madness! Everlasting Death!

## The Gathering of God's Elect

In verse twenty-eight our Master tells us plainly that the first order of business and the primary purpose of His great second advent shall be the gathering of His elect. Throughout the Word of God we are distinctly and constantly taught that our God does all things for the elect's sake. — *"And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."* Mark puts it in these words: *"And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the*

*uttermost part of heaven” (Mark 13:27).*

Just as God’s servants, as the angels of God, are sent out to gather His elect into His kingdom from the four corners of the earth by the preaching of the Gospel, so at the end of time those heavenly spirits created to minister to the chosen shall be sent forth to fetch them out of the earth and gather them, all of them, even their dust and ashes unto Christ in glory! As the angels carried Lazarus into Abraham’s bosom, so they shall carry all God’s elect into heaven’s bosom to be with Christ!

I stated before that the gathering out of God’s elect will immediately precede the Lord’s judgment upon the earth. Our safety shall be taken care of when the Lord consumes the earth with the fiery brightness of His coming. Nothing shall be done to destroy the earth until God’s elect are beyond the reach of harm (2 Peter 3:9). Not one drop of rain fell until Noah was safe in the ark. Fire and brimstone could not fall upon Sodom until Lot was safely secluded in Zoar. And God’s wrath will not consume His enemies in the earth until He has taken His saints out of the earth.

Blessed be our God, there is a great gathering day coming! We who believe ought to look forward to that great day with unmingled joy, without the slightest dread or fear (2 Thessalonians 2:1; Titus 2:13). It shall be the gracious gathering of God’s chosen. The elect shall be gathered in righteousness, being made worthy to stand before God by the righteousness of Christ, which is our righteousness (v. 36; Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16; Colossians 1:12).

## The Parable of the Fig Tree

“And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, 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 at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled” (vv. 29-32).

Our Lord sternly reproved the Pharisees because they could not “*discern the signs of the times*” (Matthew 16:3). They could not see that the scepter was passing away from Judah. They did not see that Daniel’s seventy weeks were fulfilled. Let us beware of such blindness. It is a blindness caused by spiritual lethargy and an overmuch fondness for this world.

This parable of the fig tree is not a deep, mysterious, secretive thing. In this parable our Lord tells us plainly that when we see the things spoken of in its context, as Mark relates this discourse (Mark 13:14), when we see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, His glorious second advent is at hand.

The abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel is the revelation (to God’s saints, not to the world) of antichrist (Arminian, freewill, works religion). It is that which Paul speaks of in 2 Thessalonians 2, the loosing of Satan to deceive the nations of the world (Revelation 20:1-8).

The lesson of the parable of the fig tree is just this: While we must never even guess at or try to figure out the time of Christ’s coming, increasing darkness, ungodliness, apostasy, and idolatry ought to cause every believer to live on the tip-toe of faith, looking expectantly for Christ’s appearing.

The rising infidelity, increasing acceptance of popery, Islam, Judaism, and mysticism, the worldwide will-worship of this apostate age, the lawlessness, the anarchy, the contempt of authority, the acceptance of sexual promiscuity, (fornication, adultery, homosexuality), and the general calling of evil good and good evil ought to be glaring beacons in our eyes and trumpets in our ears telling us — “THIS IS THE END! Judgment has begun. The end is near. The Lord is coming.”

The more we see these things coming to pass the more reason we have to look up in hope. Our redemption draws nigh! We must therefore watch, be sober, and keep our garments white and unspotted from the world (Revelation 16:15). Armageddon is here. The judgment of the great whore is at hand. The Lord is coming!

## The Certainty of God's Word

In verse 33 our Lord seems to have anticipated our tendency toward skepticism and unbelief and therefore warns us emphatically against it. — *“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.”*

We must never allow ourselves to give any credibility to any questioning of God’s Word. Let us never dare imagine that any word of prophecy is improbable or unlikely simply because it seems contrary to nature, or experience, or our judgment. Let us never be found among those arrogant fools who imagine that they are smarter than God. We must never find ourselves agreeing with those scoffers who, walking after their own lusts, say, *“Where is the promise of his coming?”* (2 Peter 3:3-4).

## The People Worthy

Now, look at verses 34-36. Here our Lord Jesus tells us to watch and pray that we may be found worthy to escape his wrath and stand before the Son of Man when he comes to judge the world.

“And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

Let us watch, lest we be corrupted from the simplicity of Christ and engulfed with the corruptions of the religious world around us. Ever watch against freewill/works religion, will worship, self-righteousness, and legalism. Watch against idolatry.

But how can we be counted worthy to escape the wrath of the great Judge, when He comes in His glory to judge the earth? How can we be made worthy to stand before the Son of Man in that day? That is altogether the work of His grace. Our worthiness is

His blood atonement, His righteousness imputed to us in justification and imparted to us in the new birth! Our worthiness before God is Christ!

Bold shall I stand in that great day,  
For who ought to my charge shall lay,  
When, with His righteous garments on,  
I am as holy as God's Own Son?

### God's Restless Servant

I cannot fail to call your attention to our Savior's constant, faithful devotion to the souls of men, the glory of God, and the preaching of the Gospel, as it is described in verses 37-38.

“And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called *the mount* of Olives. And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him.”

He never wearied of His labor of love. He never laid aside His commission. Yes, sometimes we find Him obliged to sit to rest Himself by a well, and sometimes obliged to catch a nap in the day. But, even then, He was resting to meet a woman who needed grace, and was sleeping on His way to save a wild Gadarene. He came here to seek and to save that which was lost, and never gave up the work. Aren't you glad? I am! It is no marvel that “*the people came early in the morning to Him in the temple, for to hear Him!*”

It is my constant prayer that He who so graciously served and serves my soul will give me the constant supply of His grace that I may serve Him in serving His elect for the glory of God, proclaiming the Gospel of His grace in this wicked and perverse generation.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I

trust also are made manifest in your consciences.” (2  
Corinthians 5:10-11)

Christ is coming again. You and I are going to meet God in judgment. We are going to spend eternity somewhere, either in the torments of the damned in hell or in the bliss of the redeemed in heaven. Our only hope is Christ. Trust Him, and live forever. Child of God, the Lord is coming. REJOICE!

# Chapter 123

## Preparations for the Last Passover

Luke 22:1-13

“Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people. Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude. Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the Passover, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples? And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the Passover” (Luke 22:1-13).

Luke 22 begins Luke’s inspired narrative of our adorable Savior’s sufferings and death as our Substitute. We now begin to

consider the most holy, most profound, and most wondrous things revealed in the Book of God. Nothing is so sublime, so solemn, and so sweet to the regenerate soul as the sacrifice of Christ. No portion of Holy Scripture is more important than the things God the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to describe in these last chapters of his Gospel narrative. And no part of our Lord's earthly history is so fully given by all the Gospel writers as this. Only Matthew and Luke describe the circumstances of our Redeemer's birth. But all four gospel writers describe our Savior's death minutely. And, of the four, Luke's account is the most detailed.

In these first thirteen verses Luke sets before us the preparations made by our Lord Jesus for the last observance of the Passover and for the first observance of the Lord's Supper. It is important that we recognize this fact. Our Savior here forever abolished the legal, Jewish Passover and established as a perpetual ordinance in His church the observance of the Lord's Supper. That which He prepared to keep with His disciples was the last Passover ever to be observed by believing men and women. Christ the true Passover was now about to be sacrificed for us. At the same time, our Lord was preparing to observe the Lord's Supper with his disciples for the first time.

### Christ our Passover

*“Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover”* (v. 1). — *First*, I want to remind you that the Old Testament Passover was merely a temporary type and picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. God the Holy Spirit declares in 1 Corinthians 5:7, *“Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.”* The Passover was the first legal ordinance established by God in the Old Testament (Exodus 12). It was established as a memorial of Israel's redemption out of Egypt by the blood of the paschal lamb and the power of God. That first Passover and all the Passover sacrifices that followed it (as well as all the other requirements, ceremonies, services, and sacrifices of the law) were given for only one purpose: — to hold forth in type the Lord Jesus Christ.

To Him the whole law pointed; and by Him the whole law was fulfilled. All those things were, as we are plainly told, shadows of good things to come (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1).

Believers in the Old Testament era observed the Passover looking upon the paschal lamb as a type of the “*Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Revelation 13:8), just as we now observe the Lord’s Supper in remembrance of the “*Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*” The lamb appointed in the Jewish Passover was to be a male of the first year without blemish and without spot. Such was Christ. The lamb was set apart four days before the Passover. So Christ was set apart eternally in the purpose, council, and foreknowledge of God (4000 years — four days earlier) and by entering into Jerusalem four days before His death upon the cursed tree. The Jewish paschal lamb was roasted whole with fire, and not a bone of it broken. So our Lord Jesus, in the accomplishment of our eternal redemption, sustained all the fire of Divine wrath against sin in His sacrifice; and we are expressly told that not one of His bones were broken, that the Scripture might be fulfilled (John 19:36.)

The Scriptures tell us that our Savior observed the feast Passover four times (every year) during the course of His earthly ministry. The first public Passover Christ observed is related to us in John 2:13-25. The second Passover, which our Lord graced with His presence, is recorded in John 5, when He healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda. The third public Passover where we find the Lord Jesus present is recorded in John 6, at which time our Lord gave instructions about himself as the Bread of Life. The fourth and last Passover the Lord Jesus kept is recorded here in Luke 22 and by Matthew, Mark, and John.

Robert Hawker made the following tremendous observation.

“If the Lord Jesus never once during His ministry omitted His attendance on the Passover, how hath He thereby endeared to His redeemed His holy Supper, instituted and appointed as it was by himself to take place in His church in the room of the Jewish Passover! Surely by this Jesus

might be supposed to intimate His holy pleasure, that His people should be always present at the celebration of it. Methinks by this constant attendance of the Lord, He meant to say that not one of his little ones should be absent at His Supper. And His servant, the Apostle, seems to have had the same views of His Master's gracious design in this particular when He saith, '*For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come*' (1 Corinthians 11:26)."

### Overruling Providence

*"And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people"* (v. 2). — *Second*, I cannot avoid again calling your attention to the display here given of the overruling providence of our God, as we read here of the chief priests and scribes plotting to murder our Savior. Though they had no awareness of it, they were but instruments in the Lord's hands for the accomplishment of His holy will and eternal decrees, by their wicked hands, doing all that they did by the "*determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*" (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 13:27-28).

How sweet! How comforting! How delightful this is! To behold the chief priests and scribes as God's instruments, for the purpose of bringing Christ into the very situation where our sins must have brought us, but for His intervention! Though they utterly hated Him, they brought Him forward on the mission for which He came into the world, to "*save His people from their sins*," being made both sin and a curse for us. There was no other means whereby we could have been redeemed; and God sovereignly overruled and used the most wicked deeds of the most wicked men to accomplish it!

I say this is sweet, comforting, and delightful to behold. Just as it was here, so it is now. Our God overrules and uses the most malicious devices of the most wicked men to bring his purposed blessings to His chosen.

## Blind Guides

*Third*, when we read that “*the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill Him,*” I am reminded that the most prominent, highly respected, and well-trained religious leaders are often blind guides. High office in the church does not indicate grace in the heart.

The first step in putting our Savior to death was taken by the religious teachers of the Jewish nation. The very men who ought to have welcomed the Messiah were the men who conspired to murder Him. The very pastors who ought to have rejoiced at the appearing of the Lamb of God plotted His slaughter. They sat in Moses’ seat. They claimed to be “*guides of the blind*” and “*lights of them that were in darkness*” (Romans 2:19). They belonged to the tribe of Levi. They were, most of them, direct descendants of Aaron. Yet, they were the very men who crucified the Lord of glory!

Beware of attaching importance, significance, and spiritual knowledge to preachers and religious leaders. Ordination papers do not make men faithful. The greatest of heresies have been started by preachers.

By all means, honor faithful men. Hear them and obey them. Faithful pastors are the angels of God to His church. They speak to you the Word of God; and they are to be followed (Hebrews 13:7, 17). But we must never allow blind men to lead us into the ditch. We must never allow modern chief priests and scribes to make us crucify Christ afresh. We must test all teachers by the unerring rule of the Word of God. — “*To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*” (Isaiah 8:20).

## Judas’ Apostasy

“Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he

might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude” (vv. 3-6)

*Fourth*, Judas’ apostasy sets before us a glaring example of the fact that men and women who appear to have a good profession of faith often prove reprobates in the end, teaching us the necessity of perseverance. The treachery here described was the treachery of one of the twelve Apostles of Christ. — “*Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve.*” Those words are peculiarly dreadful. Judas Iscariot ought to be a standing beacon to us all. Judas was one of our Lord’s chosen apostles. He followed our Lord during the whole course of His ministry. He forsook all for Christ’s sake. He heard Christ preach and saw Christ’s miracles. He preached the same doctrine Christ preached. He spoke like all the other Apostles. There was nothing about Judas to distinguish him from Peter, James, and John. He was never suspected of being unsound, let alone the betrayer. Yet, Judas was a reprobate man, “*the son of perdition*” (John 17:12).

At best we have but a faint conception of the horrid deceitfulness of our hearts. The lengths to which men may go in religion without grace in their hearts is far greater than we think (Psalm 139:23-24; Matthew 10:22; 1 Corinthians 9:26-27; Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:38-39; 1 John 2:19-20).

### **Beware of Covetousness**

*Fifth*, the fact that Judas’ betrayal was the result of his love of money reinforces our Lord’s warning in Luke 12:15. — “*Take heed and beware of covetousness.*” What enormous power the love of money has over men! When Judas went to the chief priests and offered to betray his Master, “*they were glad, and covenanted to give him money*” (v. 5). That tells us the hidden secret of Judas’ heart and the motive behind his behavior. He loved money. He loved the world. He was fond of riches. He had heard our Lord’s solemn warning. — “*Take heed and beware of*

*covetousness.*” But he gave it no heed. Covetousness was the rock upon which he made shipwreck of his soul. Covetousness drug him headlong into hell!

Beware of the love of this world, particularly as it involves the love of money, which the Holy Spirit tells us is “*the root of all evil*” (1 Timothy 6:10). Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira, and Judas were brought to ruin because of their love of money. And the money they sought, for which they sold their souls, was terribly insignificant! For a mere thirty pieces of silver Judas Iscariot betrayed the Son of God! — Thirty pieces of silver (roughly \$30.00!) was the legal price of a slave. No doubt, these religious hypocrites soothed their consciences by telling themselves that by purchasing Jesus like any other slave, it was perfectly legal for them to hand him over to the Roman authorities. — Thirty pieces of silver (roughly \$30.00!). What did Judas buy with his hellish craftiness? He did not gain acceptance with the powerful, elite priests and scribes, as he probably hoped he would; but was now looked upon as nothing but a contemptible slave trader, a hireling, and a betrayer. — Thirty pieces of silver (roughly \$30.00!), the price of a slave to a greedy man, proved at last to be the price he put upon his own immortal soul. — Thirty pieces of silver (roughly \$30.00!) was taken out of the temple treasury, silver that was marked for the purchase of sacrifices. The Lamb of God was purchased with money from the temple treasury for the price of a slave!

Beware, I repeat, of the love of money! It is a subtle thing, and far nearer than we might imagine. A poor man is just as susceptible to it as a rich man. Some have much who do not love it; and many have very little who yet love it. Let us be “*content with such things as we have*” (Hebrews 13:5), be it little or much. We never know what we might do if we became suddenly rich. I find it striking that in the Book of Wisdom (Proverbs) we find only one prayer (Proverbs 30:8-9).

“Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who *is* the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God

*in vain.”*

## Made Ready

“Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the Passover, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples? And he shall show you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the Passover” (vv. 7-13).

*Sixth*, we learn that when the time came for the Passover to be kept, everything was made ready. Even so, when chosen sinners are called by the Spirit of God to eat the true Passover, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, they find everything made ready for them.

All things were made ready by Divine arrangement. What a marvelous display we have in these verses of our Savior’s absolute dominion over all things and all men! The disciples found a man by Divine direction, who by Divine command provided everything that was needed.

All things were made ready for the keeping of the feast. A lamb was provided. The lamb was slain and burnt upon the altar for the Lord God and for these disciples. Its blood was sprinkled at the foot of the altar. The lamb was brought into the house, where it was to be eaten. The lamb was roasted and eaten with bitter herbs.

In all these things we see a close parallel with Christ our Passover who was sacrificed for us, and of our faith in Him. Four times we are reminded in these thirteen verses that the evening

before our Savior's crucifixion was the appointed "*day when the Passover must be killed.*" — "*Then came the day!*" How thankful I am that that day came! Aren't you! — "*In due time Christ died for the ungodly!*"

By divine arrangement, the Lamb of God died at the very time when the Passover-lamb was being slain. The death of Christ was the fulfillment of the Passover. He was the true sacrifice to which every Passover-lamb had been pointing for 1500 years. What the death of the lamb had been to Israel in Egypt, His death is to us in reality. The safety which the blood of the Passover-lamb had provided for Israel, His blood provides in infinite abundance for believing sinners. Blessed be God forever — "*Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us!*"

# Chapter 124

## “In Remembrance of Me”

Luke 22:14-20

“And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide [it] among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake [it], and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup [is] the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:14-20).

In these verses the Holy Spirit describes how our blessed Savior instituted, as a perpetual ordinance in His Church, the observance of the Lord’s Supper. This is one of those passages of Holy Scripture that ought to immediately arouse deep reverence in our hearts.

I find it utterly astonishing that this blessed ordinance of Divine worship, so beautifully simple and majestic, so delightfully unifying and blessed, has been made a matter of fear and a point of controversy and division throughout the history of the Church. How dishonoring that is to our Savior, by whom the ordinance was established and for whose honor it is to be kept!

## No Fencing

We are specifically told that Judas was with the disciples when the Lord Jesus established this ordinance in His Church. — “*And when the hour was come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him*” (v. 14). After making his bargain with the chief priests, Scribes, and elders to betray the Son of God, Judas brazenly came and took his place with the rest of the apostles, both to cover his sin and to watch the best opportunity of betraying the Master.

This fact makes it abundantly clear that our Lord did not fence the Table to keep unbelievers from eating the bread and wine with believers. He did not give any basis for the practice of closed communion.

Let me be clearly understood. The Lord’s Supper, like baptism and Church membership, is for believers only. We must never encourage unbelievers to join us in observing this blessed ordinance of the Gospel. Yet, we must never attempt to set barriers around the Table to keep anyone away. The Holy Spirit makes it crystal clear that it is the responsibility of the person who eats the bread and drinks the wine to examine himself to be certain that he or she is a believer, one who discerns the Lord’s body, warning all those who eat and drink unworthily, that is to say without faith in Christ, that they eat and drink damnation to themselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

You, and you alone can determine whether you are in the faith. If you profess faith in Christ, it is my responsibility and the responsibility of all believers to look upon your profession as genuine and to receive you “*without doubtful disputations,*” without suspicion (Romans 14:1).

Our Lord knew that Judas was a devil and that he was, at that time, looking for an opportunity to betray Him. Yet, when He passed out the bread and wine, He gave it to Judas, as well as to James and John, because Judas professed to be one of His.

## Christ's Desire

In verse 15 our Savior expressed His heart's ambition and desire to redeem us. — *“And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.”* He desired to eat this, the last passover, with His disciples because, in doing so, He had come to the end of His mission in this world. He was about to suffer all the fury of God's holy wrath and offended justice as our Substitute and enter into His glory. Before doing so, He established this communion ordinance as a perpetual reminder to us that our union and communion with Him is based upon and arises from His sin-atonement death upon the cursed tree.

He desired to eat it with them, with His disciples, because His desire is toward us his people (2Peter 3:9). It was so from everlasting, when He desired us as His spouse and bride. It was so in time, when He became incarnate, suffered, died, and gave Himself for us. His desire is towards His people before they are called, while unregenerate, unbelieving rebels. And His desire is with us and toward us still, notwithstanding all our sin and unbelief (Song of Solomon 5:1-2).

In ourselves we are black with sin; but in Him we are comely and beautiful, robed with His righteousness, washed, pure, and made white in His precious blood; so comely and beautiful in His eyes that He declares He is ravished by us! Imagine that! The Son of God declares that we ravish His heart (Song of Solomon 4:9). Therefore, He desires our company and communion always!

The Lord Jesus delighted in us from eternity, viewing us as perfect in himself before the world was made. We were the joy set before Him, the joy that sustained Him and carried Him through His sufferings and death. You and I, child of God, are the objects of His unceasing desires and prayers!

Our blessed Savior desired with desire to eat this, the last passover, because that meant that His sufferings and death were at hand, that the eternal redemption of our souls was about to be accomplished (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10). Justice would soon be satisfied. The law would soon be fulfilled. Our sins would soon be atoned for and put away. The Father

would soon be glorified by His obedience unto death.

## Until it be Fulfilled

The law, once it was fulfilled by Him, was about to end. The passover and all the ceremonies and rituals of the law were about to be abolished forever. Therefore, He said, “*I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God*” (v. 16). Now that it has all been fulfilled by Him, our blessed Savior girds himself with grace and serves us with all that was signified and typified in the law. And, in the glory that soon shall be ours we will eat and drink together with Him in his Father’s kingdom, and spend an endless eternity in never fading joys and pleasures, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Exodus 15:1-18).

## The Cup

“And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide *it* among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come” (vv. 17-18)

In the observance of the Jewish passover four cups were used. Commonly, as each cup was passed around the table, one by one, the head of the house would lead the family in prayer and thanksgiving. Then the family would drink from the cups, divided among them. Having done this, the Lord Jesus said, “*For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of this vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.*”

What was our Lord referring to here? Perhaps He was simply saying, “I am about to leave this world, and will never again eat and drink with you physically.” Perhaps He was talking about the new wine of grace that was to be poured out by Him in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. I think He was most likely referring to the everlasting celebration of redemption with us in eternal glory, when we shall eat and drink at His table forever, as He tells us in verse 30.

## The Ordinance Established

In verses 14-18 we are given a record of the Lord Jesus observing the last passover feast with His family, with His disciples. In verses 19 and 20 the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is established.

“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (vv. 19-20).

We know that these words refer to the establishing of the Lord's Supper, because the Holy Spirit tells us that in 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. Read the last line of verse 19 again. — “*This do in remembrance of me.*” How many times have we read this command, without pausing to consider its implications? The first implication of this command is that this ordinance, as I stated in the beginning, is for believers only. In order to remember Christ you must first know Him. I hope that you do know the Savior. If you do, the Lord's Table is spread for you. But if you do not know Him, you must not eat the bread and drink the wine. Second, this command reveals the love of Christ for us. Our Savior would not care for us to remember Him, if He did not love us. Love wants to be remembered. And our Lord Jesus, as He was leaving this world, whispered into the ear of His bride, “*Remember me.*” And, third, this command implies a horrible tendency in us to forget our Redeemer. Because our Lord remembers that we are dust, He graciously established this ordinance that we might, in observing it, remember Him.

In our assembly we gather around the Lord's Table every Sunday night to observe the Lord's Supper, according to His commandment. The Table is our Lord's memorial. As we eat the bread and drink the wine, we should earnestly pray that God the Holy Spirit will graciously enable us to remember Christ, our Beloved.

In these two verses of Scripture we have complete directions for observing the Lord's Supper. Here we see what it is and how

it is to be done. The directions are plain, clear, and definite. We must “*this do.*” It would not be right to do something else. It would not be right to do this for some other purpose. And it would not be right to do this in some other way.

## Simplicity

This blessed ordinance is to be observed with simplicity. There is nothing here that is ornate, mysterious, or even visibly impressive. The ordinances of the Gospel are simple, like Christ himself, transparent, and unpretentious. There is nothing here but bread and wine.

This is an ordinance to be frequently observed. Paul said, “*As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death ‘til he come.*” Because we have a constant need to be reminded of our Lord and His work of redemption, He has given us an ordinance to frequently aid our memory.

This is an ordinance to be observed by all the Lord’s people. Around this Table, as in the kingdom of God, we are all equal. Our needs are the same. Our grounds of acceptance are the same. Our acceptance with our God is the same. We are “*accepted in the Beloved,*” by the merits of His righteousness and shed blood, in union with Him, as one with Him.

This ordinance is a token of God’s everlasting covenant of grace. Every time we eat the bread and drink the wine, we should be reminded of that covenant God made with his Son on our behalf before the worlds were made. It is a covenant of grace (Romans 9:16-18). It is ordered in all things and sure (2 Samuel 23:5). It is a covenant ratified by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 13:20).

This blessed ordinance is a picture sermon of our Redeemer’s death. We remember Christ best when we remember His death. The unleavened bread is the symbol of His body, His holy humanity, His accomplished righteousness as our God-man Representative. The wine represents His precious blood, His accomplished redemption as our Substitute and covenant Surety.

And our observance of this ordinance is a picture of our salvation by faith in Christ. To trust Christ is to receive Him, to eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6:51-56). By faith in Him, we take to ourselves all that Christ is and all that He accomplished as our God-man Mediator, receiving the atonement He performed for us (Romans 5:11).

## "This Do"

We are commanded to keep this ordinance. Our Savior said, "*This do.*" Therefore, we may reasonably and safely infer that it is always proper for us to do it. It is always proper for God's people to observe the Lord's Supper, to keep the ordinance, and never proper not to do it. We may eat the Lord's Supper, though we often sadly forget Him. In fact, our forgetfulness is a reason to come to this ordinance.

We may come to the Table, though others forget our Savior. We come not to judge others, but to remember Christ. And if some of our brethren are out of sorts, that does not bar us from the privilege of this ordinance. We may come to this ordinance no matter how weak, cold, and sinful we are. Our worthiness is Christ. We keep the ordinance to remember His goodness and grace.

It will be sweet, refreshing and comforting to you to eat the Lord's Table. What can be sweeter than the remembrance of Christ? What can be more refreshing to your soul? What can be so comforting to your heart?

## "In Remembrance"

The object of this ordinance is that we may remember our dear Savior. — "*This do in remembrance of Me.*" We are to observe this ordinance in remembrance of Christ himself, not His doctrines, but himself, not His precepts, but himself. As we eat the bread and drink the wine, let us remember the Lord Jesus. Remember Him as the only Object of your faith and the mighty

Representative of your soul: past, present, and future. Remember the Lord Jesus as the Joy of your heart, the Rewarder of your hope, and the Lord of your life.

Remember Christ. Remember who He is. Remember what He has done. Remember why He did it. Remember what He is to you (1 Corinthians 1:30). Remember Him with sincere gratitude. Remember Him with deep love. Remember Him with confident faith.

“Remember Thee, and all Thy pains,  
And all Thy love to me—  
Yes, while a pulse or breath remains,  
I will remember Thee.

And when these failing lips grow dumb,  
And thought and memory flee;  
When Thou shalt in Thy kingdom come,  
Jesus, remember me!”

Let me remind you of four things clearly set before us in this passage.

1. The purpose of the Lord’s Supper is to perpetually remind us of Christ’s death for us, to remind us of the cost of our redemption. The bread represents His body, his holy humanity sacrificed for us. The wine represents His precious, sin-atoning blood.

2. This is not an optional ordinance, any more than believer’s baptism is an optional ordinance. It is the privilege and responsibility of every believer to observe the Lord’s Supper, in remembrance of Christ.

3. There will always be betrayers in our midst. The words of verses 21 and 22 are recorded here so plainly that it is obvious that the Holy Spirit intended for us to be reminded that tares always grow side by side with wheat. Our Savior said, — *“Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man*

*by whom he is betrayed!*” We are never justified in separating ourselves from God’s Church and people because some among us are devils. And we are never justified in refusing to observe the Lord’s Supper because we imagine that some at the Table might be unbelievers.

4. It is your own responsibility, and no one else’s, to examine yourself (1 Corinthians 11:23-29). You alone must determine whether you are or are not a believer, trusting Christ alone as your Savior, whether you discern the Lord’s body, the purpose of His incarnation, obedience, and death as the sinner’s Substitute.

# Chapter 125

## “Who is the greatest?”

Luke 22:21-30

“But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me [is] with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed! And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye [shall] not [be] so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether [is] greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? [is] not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:21-30).

We often try to make comparisons between material, earthly things and spiritual, heavenly things. But there is one great problem with all such comparisons: — They simply cannot be made! Any rule or principle that is taken from the natural realm and applied to the spiritual realm must be reversed. In the natural realm success is measured by gain. In the spiritual world success is measured by loss (Matthew 16:25). In the natural world wealth is gained and measured by what a man is able to gain and save. In

the spiritual world wealth is gained and measured by what he gives (Proverbs 19:17; 11:24; 22:9; Luke 6:38). In natural things a “self-made” man is admired. In spiritual things a self-made man is condemned (Romans 4:4-5). In natural things ambition and aggressiveness are looked upon as commendable things. In the kingdom of God they are deplorable things. Natural men are admired who strive for advancement and promotion. But the Spirit of God teaches us to strive for abasement and servitude.

This was a hard lesson for the disciples to learn, because, like us, they each wanted to be the greatest. In the New Testament it appears that the one thing which disrupted the fellowship, communion, and harmony of our Lord’s disciples, more than anything else, was personal ambition, the desire for personal exaltation, recognition, and greatness (Matthew 18:1; 20:20-21; Mark 9:33-35; Luke 9:46-48).

Even as they sat around the Table with the Lord Jesus on the eve of His crucifixion, eating the last supper, while He talked to them about His death, as He gave them the blessed ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, “*there was a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest!*” What a pitiful picture we have before us: — Brethren, sitting together with Christ at the table of communion striving about which of them would betray the Master (vv. 22-23) and which of them would be counted the greatest (v. 24).

Where humility should have abounded, pride and ambition intruded! When love and unity should have prevailed, ambition divided! Our Lord’s words to us in Luke 22:21-30 are intended by Him to cure us of the evil of ambition, of self-seeking, self-serving, self-promoting pride. As we read this sad story, let us ask God the Holy Spirit to teach us its lessons. I remind you that the Lord Jesus had just eaten the last passover with His disciples and instituted the blessed ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. Then, the Lord Jesus gave them an example of humility and love that should forever cure his followers of this evil (John 13:12-17). After that, the disciples began to fuss about who should be accounted the greatest among them.

Very few realize it; but he that is greatest in the kingdom of

God is the servant of all. We all have lofty desires. We talk piously about our desires to be like Christ, to live the Christian life, to honor God in our lives. Is that truly the desire of our hearts? If it is, let us pray that God the Holy Spirit will teach us to serve one another. If the Son of God made himself the least, we must not strive to be the greatest. If our Master became our Servant, let us serve one another (Philippians 2:1-7).

## "He that Serveth"

*First*, our Lord assumed the place of a servant among His disciples. He says, "*I am among you as he that serveth.*" In this world our Lord was not one of the cultured few upon whom others wait. He was not one of the rich, the mighty, or the noble whom others serve. He was the Servant of servants (Mark 10:42-45). When He came down from heaven, He took upon himself the form of a servant.

In the circle of His disciples Christ was always the one who served. He healed the sick. He fed the multitudes. Only once did He ask anyone to give Him anything; and then it was that He might show His humility. Being a Jew, He condescended to ask a Samaritan woman for a drink of water. Even then, His object was that He might serve her.

Where He was most evidently the Master, among His own disciples, He was most evidently the Servant. Like a shepherd, He was Servant to His sheep. Like a nurse, He was Servant to the children of God. Like a chambermaid, He washed His disciples' feet.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper the Lord himself was among His disciples as "*he that serveth.*" He provided the table. He desired the fellowship of His brethren at the Passover. He broke the bread. He offered the prayer. He poured the wine.

Throughout the whole course of His life on earth, the Lord Jesus took the position of a servant, a slave. When He entered into the covenant of grace with the Father as our Surety, the Son of God became a voluntary Servant (Psalm 40:6; Isaiah 50:5-7;

Exodus 21:6). When He came into the world to save us, He announced himself as the Servant of Jehovah (Psalm 40:7; Hebrews 10:5-10). The physical body prepared for our Savior and all His earthly surroundings were fitted for service (Hebrews 10:5; Philippians 2:7; 2 Corinthians 8:9).

Throughout His life, our Lord Jesus cared for and served others (Matthew 20:28). He laid aside His own will and pleasure and came to do the will and pleasure of His Father, serving our interest (John 4:34; 6:38). He patiently bore all manner of evil from men as one who is servant to another (1 Peter 2:23). The Son of God assumed the lowest place among men, that He might bring us to the highest place of heavenly glory as the sons of God (Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 53:3; 2 Corinthians 8:9).

## Adore Him

What we have seen thus far should fill our hearts with wonder and adoration. What astonishing love! What amazing grace! He who is the Son of God became Servant to those who are His servants! Does that fact not astonish you? — He who is Lord of all became the Servant of all His people (Colossians 1:15-19). The Creator served the creature! The Ruler served His subjects! The Firstborn served the adopted children! He who is “*all fullness*” served us, who are all emptiness! He who has all preeminence served us, who are less than nothing!

He who is infinitely Superior in wisdom, power, and holiness became Servant to the very lowest (Matthew 8:26-27; John 14:9). He gave sight to blind beggars. He defended an adulterous woman. He calmed the troubled waters for His unbelieving disciples. He ministered to the small child. He stretched out His hand to drowning Peter. He removed the doubts of doubting Thomas. He came to Peter, when Peter had forsaken him.

But do not imagine that our Lord’s service was limited to those disciples, or even to His time on earth. He performed all His earthly service for us. He serves us now. And He will serve us forever. He who is our great Benefactor became Servant to us who are the beneficiaries of His grace (John 15:16). The

righteousness He accomplished was for us (Romans 5:19). The death He died, the atonement He made was for us (Galatians 4:4-5). His heavenly intercession is for us (Hebrews 7:24-25). His providential rule is for us (John 17:2). The angelic hosts, His holy servants, are sent by Him to serve us (Hebrews 1:14). Throughout the ages of eternity, all the glory, joy, and bliss of heaven will be given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. Even then, He will serve us (Luke 12:37). Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, condescends to serve us, who are altogether unworthy of His notice, much less His service.

## The Cause

How can this great condescension on the part of Christ be explained? What is the cause of it? What is the reason for it? Why has He done it? Here are three answers: (1.) The Lord Jesus Christ is so infinitely great that He loses nothing by serving us (Hebrews 1:2-4). — (2.) The Son of God is so full of love to us that His love for us compels Him to serve us (John 15:9; 1 John 3:16; John 13:1). And (3.) our Mediator, the God-man, is so entirely consecrated to the glory of God that He willingly endured even the painful, shameful death of the cross for us, that He might glorify God (Matthew 26:38-39; John 12:28).

## Imitate Him

May God the Holy Spirit graciously teach us to imitate our Savior by serving one another. Let this be the rule of our lives (John 13:5, 13-15). If we would be great in the kingdom of God, we must become servants. There is no greater, more noble ambition than this (Ephesians 4:32-5:1). If we would follow Christ, let us cheerfully choose to fulfil the most lowly services in the kingdom of God. Blessed are those saved sinners who seek from God the Holy Spirit the spirit of true love and humility toward their brethren (Ephesians 4:1-3; Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 5:5). It is in this way that we are to continually lay down our lives for one another (1 John 3:16-17). This is that which inspired the

apostle Paul to spend and be spent for God's elect (2 Corinthians 12:15). May God give us grace to make self-sacrifice the rule by which we live, ever seeking the good of others (Philippians 2:4-5).

Rather than whining, "Nobody comes to see me," why don't you go see somebody? Rather than complaining because no one calls me, I ought to call someone. Rather than selfishly thinking, "Nobody seems to care about me," we ought to take care of others. Rather than being bitter because we are forgotten, we ought to make it our business to remember others. Over the span of more than sixty years in this world, I have observed a remarkable thing: — Those who spend their lives caring for and serving others never whine and complain about being neglected and overlooked or forgotten, while those who constantly complain about being neglected and overlooked and forgotten seldom do anything for anyone but themselves.

If we would serve Christ and His people, we should never avenge ourselves, bring grief to others, or disrupt the blessed peace of God's saints; but rather bear any injustices done to us, just as our Master did (1 Peter 2:19-21). Always seek the place in God's Kingdom in which you are likely to receive the least and can give the most. Choose to serve rather than to be served! Our Lord did. The place of highest honor in the Church of God is the place of greatest service. The towel with which Christ wiped His disciples' feet is indescribably more attractive than the royal robes of the greatest king on earth.

There are just two kinds of people in this world: — Those who use and those who are used. God, make me one who is used. — Those who take and those who give. I want to be a giver. — Those who are served and those who serve. I pray that God will make me a servant. — *"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."*

Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Christ, the Servant of all (Matthew 11:11). Let us strive to be like Him!

# Chapter 126

## Peter's Fall and Restoration

### Luke 22:31-34

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

“Then took they him, and led [him], and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this [fellow] also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.” (Luke 22:54-62)

The verses before us record the painful, but very instructive, story of Peter's terrible denial of the Lord Jesus. This sad story is

recorded in detail in all four Gospel narratives. Yet, neither Matthew, Mark, Luke, nor John make any excuse for or defense of their friend, Peter. They all wrote their histories, not as mere men writing about men, but as instruments of Divine inspiration. This story of Peter's fall was written by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit for our learning and admonition. May the Spirit of God who gave us this story four times now inscribe its lessons upon our hearts by His almighty grace, for Christ's sake.

Try to picture the scene and the events which transpired on that cold, bitter night, if you can. It was a solemn, solemn night. Our Lord Jesus himself called it "*the judgment (crisis) of this world.*" The disciples had just observed the last passover meal of the legal dispensation and the first communion service of the Gospel age. The Lord Jesus told them plainly of His certain, imminent betrayal and death. Peter, James, and John had spent the night with the Son of God in Gethsemane. On that sacred evening, our Savior preached that marvelous sermon which is recorded in John 14, 15, and 16. It was on this night, earlier in the evening, that our Master, our great High Priest, offered that great prayer for us which is recorded in John 17. The soldiers came, like a mob of lynchmen, into the garden to arrest the Lord of glory, led by His own familiar friend, Judas Iscariot. Judas betrayed Him with a kiss. And Peter denied the Lord Jesus, denied him again, and denied him a third time, cussing like a drunken sailor.

Why do you suppose this record is given four times in the New Testament? I do not pretend to know the full answer to that question; but I can think of at least four reasons why this sad tale is told in such detail by all four Gospel writers. Surely the Holy Spirit means for us to give it special attention.

1. Peter's denial of the Lord Jesus must have greatly increased the pain and suffering of our tender-hearted Savior.
2. The Holy Spirit would set before us, in a most emphatic way, the greatness of our Savior's saving power, the majesty of His unconditional grace, and the immutability His faithfulness.

3. The divine Comforter knew that we would all be subject to these same temptations.
4. The fourfold record of Peter's fall is intended to be a startling, instructive lesson for us concerning the frailty of the best of men.

The Word of God does not tell us very much even about the very best of men who lived in Bible times. The histories of God's saints in Scripture are very scanty. Yet, the Word of God very particularly records the faults and falls of the most eminent saints. It seems that the Holy Spirit's purpose is to remind us incessantly that "*all flesh is grass!*" The best of men are only men at best. And He incessantly reminds us that "*Salvation is of the LORD!*" Peter was not the infallible bishop of Rome, as the papists pretend. He was just a frail, fallible, fickle, sinful man. The only thing the pope has in common with Peter is his denial of Christ.

Peter's fall seems to say to every one of us — "You, too, are weak. You, too, will fall, if left to yourself. Do not ever trust yourself. Trust Christ entirely. Lean on him incessantly. Do not rely upon your great experiences or the imaginary strength and firmness of your faith. Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat. Christ alone can hold you up. Christ alone can keep you." We must ever watch and pray! We must each diligently watch over our own souls and prayerfully seek the Lord's preserving grace, if we would live for the honor of His name.

I want to live for the honor of Christ. I want to honor and magnify Him in my living as well as in my preaching. I know that you who love Him want the same thing. My heart shudders, my soul trembles at the thought of bringing reproach upon the name of Him who loved me and gave himself for me. Yet, I know this — Unless Christ himself preserves me from the evil that is in me and preserves you from the evil that is in you, we will, most certainly, profane His name.

## The Circumstances of Peter's Fall

How did such a great man come to commit such a grievous evil? Luke is not describing a lost man, but a saint, a child of God, redeemed by blood, justified in Christ, saved by grace, and sanctified by the Spirit. Peter was in the tenor of his life a faithful giant among faithful giants. Few before him and few after him could stand shoulder to shoulder with Peter. He was a man strong in faith, firm in conviction, bold in preaching and unrelenting in his zeal for Christ.

This man was eminent even among the apostles, a leader among leaders, an example among examples. But this man, great as he was, was just a man. Like you and me, he was a man whose heart, by nature, was full of sin, whose flesh was weak.

On that dark, dark night in the high priest's palace, this man's evil heart broke out in a horrible display of ungodliness, in an act as evil and vile as any in human history. The godly apostle Peter blasphemously denied the Son of God with foul oaths!

How can we account for this thing? As we look at the circumstances of Peter's fall, I remind you, there were no extenuating circumstances to excuse or even mitigate his guilt. Indeed, everything recorded in the inspired Gospel records aggravates his offense.

Peter's fall was very strange because he was one of the Lord Jesus' most highly favored and most highly honored disciples. The Lord had done so much for Peter! He was one of the very first to whom the Son of God made himself known while He was in the world, one of the first to be saved by the power of His word (John 1:40-42). Peter was in the inner circle of the Master's most intimate friends. Peter seems to have been the chief spokesman for the early church<sup>23</sup>.

Peter's Fall is especially sad because he was plainly and faithfully warned of his great danger (Luke 22:31-34). Our Lord

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23 The greater our privileges and the higher our honors, the greater our responsibilities are and the more horrible our offenses.

Jesus told Peter in the plainest language possible exactly what was going to happen to him. He even gave him the details. Peter was told of the danger to which he was about to be exposed. Satan desired to have him. His faith would be fiercely attacked. He must watch and pray, that he enter not into temptation. But Peter walked headlong into danger. He rejected the light God had given him. He ignored the revelation of God's Word!

Peter's guilt is aggravated by the fact that it came so soon after he had confidently declared his loyalty to Christ (Matthew 26:31-35; Luke 22:33). Just a few hours after his proud, confident boast of his love for Christ, Peter cursed and denied Him three times. How fickle we are!

Still, Peter's fall did not come at once, but by degrees. He followed the Lord afar off (v. 51). He sat in the seat of scorners (v. 55), seeking the comfort and warmth their fire provided. And he denied the Lord Jesus by degrees. At first, he pretended not to understand the maiden's words. Then, he denied that he knew the man (Compare Matthew 16:18 and John 6:69)<sup>24</sup>. At last, he took the profane language of base, ungodly men to prove that he was no follower of the holy Lamb of God<sup>25</sup>.

Here is another very great aggravation of Peter's sin: — All this was done very close to the place where his Lord and Master was at that time suffering for him, bearing his reproach! The Lord Jesus Christ was standing right in front of Peter, hearing every word!

What was the reason for Peter's fall? How can we account for all of this? How did this man, so great, so unique in so many ways come to commit such an horrible offense? Peter was far too proud of himself, far too confident of his own strength. He was overcome by the fear of man, in this case, by the fear of a woman

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24 It takes very little to make a great saint fall into great sin, if God leaves him to himself. Peter's trial was nothing but the word of a weak young woman, who said, "*Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.*"

25 There are many, many ways by which men and women deny the Lord Jesus Christ; but usually the falls of God's saints are not sudden. Normally, great falls are preceded by much smaller inconsistencies.

who had no obvious power against him. He neglected watchfulness over his own heart and soul (Proverbs 4:23). I suspect that, like mother Eve, Peter had begun to doubt the Savior's word.

## The Means of Peter's Recovery

Peter fell; but he did not perish. His faith weakened; but it did not die. He sinned; but he was not cast off or forsaken. He denied the Lord; but the Lord did not deny him. Peter belonged to Christ; and Christ can never lose one of His own. The good Shepherd can never lose one of His sheep. Peter fell; but Christ graciously raised him up.

The righteous fall seven times a day; but the Lord raises them up (Proverbs 24:16). How did the Lord Jesus restore His fallen servant? I see four things the Lord used to restore His fallen child.

**1. A Work of Providence** — *“The cock crew!”* God has many ways of reaching a man's conscience. He can make asses speak as easily as prophets; and He can make a rooster crow on cue. Read Psalm 107, and marvel at the goodness of God that leads His chosen to repentance!

**2. A Work of Grace** — *“The Lord turned and looked on Peter”* (Luke 22:61).

What a look that must have been! The Lord turned to Peter. Peter did not turn to the Lord. He looked upon Peter, not in anger and disgust, but in mercy, love, and grace! That look was a look of tenderness, compassion, and faithfulness. With that look the Lord spoke silently, but effectually, to the heart of His fallen child. He seems to have said, *“I have loved thee with an everlasting love...Ye have not chosen Me; but I have chosen you...I give unto you eternal life; and you shall never perish...I will never leave thee nor forsake thee...I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions...Fear not, for I have redeemed thee...In Me thy righteousness found...I am thy strength...I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed...Greater love*

*hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends...Return unto Me, return unto Me; and I will pardon.”*

**3. A Work of The Word** — *“Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice”* (v. 61). The Word of God graciously and effectually brought Peter to repentance.

**4. A Work of Our Advocate** — *“I have prayed for thee”* (Luke 22:32). As a great High Priest and Intercessor, the Lord Jesus Christ prayed for Peter’s preservation in faith and restoration by grace, even before he fell! That same great High Priest is our Advocate on high. He intercedes for us now, and has interceded for us from eternity (1 John 2:1-2).

Then, at the time appointed, the Lord Jesus came to Peter, made himself known to Peter, and made Peter to know himself (John 21:15-17). These thoughts thrill my heart and flood my soul with joy! The Lord Jesus Christ is full of tenderness and mercy. His faithfulness is great. And his compassions never fail. He who is our God and Savior is a faithful, unfailingly faithful God and Savior!

If you are a believer, if truly you trust Christ alone as your Lord and Savior, nothing shall ever separate you from Him, not even your sins (Romans 4:8). Nothing can separate us from His love, His favor, His mercy, or His care. Nothing can ever sever you from His saving power or His forgiveness. And nothing can ever tear you from His omnipotent hand of grace!

## **The Signs of Peter's Restoration**

The Lord’s works for and upon Peter were effectual. They accomplished their intended design. And Peter was graciously restored by the very Savior he so vehemently denied.

Peter’s trial and fall were not accidents. Satan ran God’s child through his rough sifter; but Peter lost nothing in the process but chaff. Peter came out of this thing a much better man than he was before, as the book of Acts demonstrates. Even this tragic affair

was under the control of God's sovereign providence and according to His purpose of grace.

The devil is God's devil. That fiend of hell is the unwilling, unwitting vassal of the Almighty (Isaiah 14:12-27). Let us never forget that fact for a moment. The dragon of hell is as much included in all things working together for good to God's elect as the angels of light (Romans 8:28).

Peter went out of the place (v. 62). Once fire was restored in his soul, he no longer needed the warmth of that fire which the Lord's enemies had kindled. He immediately forsook those who had turned his heart from his Lord.

Peter wept bitterly (v. 62). Convulsive weeping overcame him. He could not stand himself. His very heart was crushed within him. Oh, blessed is that man whose heart is broken before God. Christ Jesus heals the broken-hearted! — *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise!"* Do you know anything about repentance? Every heaven born soul does (Psalms 51:1-5).

Peter loved his Savior — *"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee"* (John 21:17). Our Lord's purpose in squeezing this confession of love from Peter was altogether gracious. Many have imagined that our Savior asked Peter this question three times to remind him of the fact that he had denied Him three times; but there is no indication that that was the case. In fact, I am confident it was not our Lord's intention here to aggravate Peter's sense of guilt and shame, but to prove to His dear disciple His grace toward him and his interest in that grace.

The well known and long proved love and grace of CHRIST JESUS to His elect inclines me to think that the SAVIOR asked Peter this question (*"Lovest thou Me?"*) three times that He might give His fallen child the opportunity to openly repeat his own assurance of his love for Christ three times. Having declared, with assurance, "Lord, I truly do love You," was the Lord's way of making Peter understand that his threefold denial was no indication of his true character as a child of God. That was not really Peter, but sin dwelling in him (Romans 7:15-20).

## The Lessons for Us

What are we to learn from this tragic event in Peter's life? How can we benefit from it? What lessons are taught by this man's fall and restoration?

Let us learn something about ourselves. We must never be presumptuous about ourselves. We are all very much like Peter in his weakness. We are all fickle, sinful wretches by nature. There is no evil in this world of which we are not capable (1 Corinthians 10:12; 4:7). We ought never be severe with our erring or fallen brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let us learn something about God's grace and His salvation in Christ. It is unconditional. It is free. And it is indestructible! What blessed security our souls have in Christ! Nothing can ever sever us from our Savior! "Once in Christ, in Christ forever!"

Let us learn something about the faithfulness of our great God and Savior. "*He abideth faithful!*" "*Faithful is he that calleth you!*" "*Great is thy faithfulness!*"

"He will never, never leave us,  
Nor will let us quite leave Him."

"*Keep yourselves in the love of God.*" Trust Christ alone. Live around the cross. Cling to Christ always. As often as you fall, return to Christ. Trust Him still. Remember, the very next word our Lord spoke to Peter, after telling him that he would deny him three times that very night, was this...

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

When we most need Him, let us turn to our Savior and trust Him still (Hebrews 4:16). He will receive you. He will forgive us. He will be gracious to us. He will forget the wrong we have done! — "*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin*" (Romans 4:8).

# Chapter 127

## Sifted Wheat

Luke 22:31-32

“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired [to have] you, that he may sift [you] as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:31-32).

If you were asked how to best secure the spiritual well-being of one of God’s saints, or how to best promote a believer’s spiritual growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, what would you recommend? I suspect you might say, “Put him in some place where he will be unmolested by the influence of the world, and always surrounded by other believers. Arrange for the brother or sister to have as few distractions, worldly cares, and tempting circumstances as possible. Encourage the child of God to spend several hours each day reading his Bible, praying, and meditating on spiritual things. And encourage him to exercise a life of strict discipline, abstaining from everything that might gratify his physical body.”

Pursue the same line of thought a little further. If I were to ask you the best way for a man to be prepared for the blessed work of preaching the Gospel, to prepare a man to be a pastor or missionary, what would you suggest? You might say, “Send him away to a Bible college or seminary. Give him a good education. Teach him Hebrew and Greek. Supply him with a good library. Surround him with other aspiring preachers, with whom he can meditate, pray, study the Bible, and discuss doctrine and religious issues of the day. And keep him, as much as possible, away from

worldly people, who might corrupt his mind.”

That has been the practice of religious people throughout history. And it is appealing. It seems to make sense. Doesn't it? But, if you care to look at history, you will discover that convents and monasteries have been, more often than not, dens of iniquity indescribable. And Bible colleges and seminaries, following the traditions of Rome, have made little improvement.

You can be sure of this fact. It applies to all things spiritual. — God's ways are not our ways. And His thoughts are not our thoughts. John Newton, the man who wrote that great hymn, “*Amazing Grace*,” understood this. He wrote...

“I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith, and love, and every grace;  
Might more of His salvation know,  
And seek more earnestly His face.

[‘Twas He who taught me thus to pray,  
And He, I trust, has answered prayer;  
But it has been in such a way  
As almost drove me to despair. ]

I hoped that in some favored hour,  
At once He'd answer my request;  
And, by His love's constraining power,  
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel  
The hidden evils of my heart,  
And let the angry powers of hell  
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea, more, with His own hand He seemed  
Intent to aggravate my woe;  
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,  
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

‘Lord, why is this?’ I trembling cried;

‘Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?’  
‘Tis in this way,’ the Lord replied,  
‘I answer prayer for grace and faith.’

‘These inward trials I employ,  
From self and pride to set thee free;  
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,  
That thou mayst seek thine all in Me.’”

In the passage before us God the Holy Spirit shows us, in the experience of His servant Peter, how our blessed Savior graciously causes His saints to grow in grace, how He causes believers to grow in faith and in the knowledge of Himself. And, in this passage we see the method our blessed, all-wise, and ever-gracious God and Savior has chosen to prepare His servants to minister to and serve His people. Read it again.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”

If we belong to Christ, Satan desires to have us, that he may sift us as wheat; but Christ Himself prays for us, and thereby keeps us secure in His grace. May God the Holy Spirit make His Word in this place effectual to our hearts by the blessing of His grace, for Christ’s sake.

## Our Adversary's Desire

*First*, the Lord Jesus declares our adversary’s desire regarding us. “*The Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.*” — As the time drew near when the Lord Jesus would be forsaken by His disciples and forsaken by His Father, when He would suffer and die as our Substitute, bearing our sins in His own body upon the cursed tree, Satan seems to have seized what he thought was a perfect opportunity to draw away the Savior’s disciples. He was not ignorant of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God, or that He came into this world in human flesh to redeem and

save His people from their sins. Satan knew our Savior had declared that He would build His Church and that the gates of hell could not prevail against it.

The fiend of hell also knew that the disciples were in a time of great confusion. They fully expected the Lord Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom. They had left all and followed Him in the expectation of immediate glory. But the Master had now told them that He must suffer and die at Jerusalem by the hands of wicked men, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Can you imagine how confused, disappointed, and frustrated they must have been. They said, “*Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?*” So the devil seems to have thought, “This is the perfect time for me to strike. If I can destroy these disciples, I will frustrate God’s purpose and promise. I will, at last, be victorious!” He seems to have reserved his great strength for this hour. He appears to have set his watchful eye upon the Lord’s followers, “*as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*”

## Job

The first two chapters of Job shed some light on this, showing us how Satan marks out his prey (Job 1:8-12; 2:4-6).

“And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that [there is] none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath [is] in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.” (Job 1:8-12)

“And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he [is] in thine hand; but save his life.” (Job 2:4-6)

If you will look at the alternate translation of Job 1:8 given in the margin of your Bible (if you have a marginal reference), you will see that the words, “*Hast thou considered my servant Job,*” might be better translated, “Hast thou set thy heart upon my servant Job?” The Lord God knew that Satan had set his malicious heart upon Job, like a butcher sets his eye upon the calf selected for slaughter, or a wolf singles out one lamb in a flock of sheep.

Satan did not deny his malicious intent. Rather, he seems to have acknowledged it. His reply to God was, “*Hast not thou made an hedge about him?*” He did not deny that his heart was set upon Job, that he longed for his hands to be dipped in the blood of Job’s heart. But he complained that God had set a hedge around him, that the Lord had put a fence around his servant through which he could not break. He could look over the hedge and roar; but he could not touch Job until God took the hedge away. Twice the Lord took the hedge away, but still preserved the object of His mercy, love, and grace, saying, “*Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.*”

Though He gave everything else to the devil, He preserved His servant Job. When the hedge was taken away, Satan burst in upon Job, first stripping away his property and his family, then afflicting his body, but he was not permitted to touch his life.

That is a pretty good picture of the scene before us in Luke 22. The wolf has surrounded the Lord’s flock, setting his heart on the sheep. Judas, the son of perdition, was permitted to take and destroy, because he was the son of perdition. But, now, with the taste of Judas’ blood still warm in his mouth, Satan sets his heart upon the rest of the disciples. The fiend of hell wanted them all!

## "Thee" and "Ye"

Did you ever wonder why the Bible sometimes uses the words "thee" and "ye", and at other times uses the word "you"? Let me show you one of the beauties of our King James translation that is completely lost in all modern translations.

In the New Testament there is a distinct difference between the words "*thee*" and "*ye*" and the word "*you*." Many object to using the word "You", when referring to or speaking to our God, because they superstitiously imagine that "Thee" is more reverent than "You." That certainly is not the case. It is no more reverent to say, "*Hallowed be Thy name*," than "*Hallowed be Your name*." Both are accurate translations of our Savior's words. We do not have to use "thee," "thou," "thy," and "thine" in our prayers to be heard by God.

Yet, as I said, there is a distinct difference between the words "*thee*" and "*ye*" and the word "*you*." Whenever you read the words "*thee*" and "*ye*" in your Bible, try to remember that those words are always singular pronouns, referring to one person. But, when you read the word "*you*," that is a plural pronoun, referring to more than one person.

That sheds much light on our Savior's words to Peter. — "*Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you*" ("*you*" all of you, my disciples), "*that he may sift you (all of you) as wheat: But I have prayed for thee*" ("*thee*" singular — specifically for you, Peter) "*that thy*" ("*thy*" singular — The words "*thy*" and "*thou*," like "*thee*" and "*ye*," are singular pronouns. The Lord is saying, Peter I have prayed for you specifically, that your) "*faith fail not*." He is saying, "Peter, Satan has set his heart on you all to destroy you by sifting you as wheat, but I have prayed for you personally, that your faith fail not."

## All Wanted

I have said all that to say this. — It is a mistake to think these words are only applicable to Peter. The Lord Jesus includes all

His disciples, both in His prayer and in His stated purpose. He includes you and me here. Satan wants us all; and our Savior wants us all. Who do you think will have what he wants?

Satan desires to have us all, that he may sift us as wheat. And, according to the measure of His own wise and gracious purpose, our Lord Jesus permits Satan to do just that. He will not allow him to have us; but He does use the devil to sift us as wheat. Yet, the Lord Jesus has prayed for us (John 17:15), prays for us (1 John 2:1-2), and secures us by His grace (John 10:28).

The difference between Judas' sin, which was for him sin unto death, and Peter's sin (as well as yours and mine), was not their deeds, or the extent of their guilt, or the aggravating circumstances of their crimes, or even that one sinned against greater light or more persistently than the other. The only difference between Judas's fall and Peter's was this. — The Lord Jesus prayed for Peter, that his faith fail not, but not for Judas.

## The Sieve

All who profess faith in Christ, all who profess to be His disciples, all who call themselves by the name of the Lord Jesus must and shall be sifted as wheat. You and I must and shall be put into the sieve. By this means, God separates the wheat from the chaff and the precious from the vile.

You know what a sieve is. Every housewife uses one when she bakes. But the sieve referred to here is not commonly used today. It was a really big version of the one your wife has in her pantry. A sieve is a large meshed basket used to separate the grain from dirt, and chaff, and rubbish. It is shaken roughly back and forth. As it is shaken to and fro, the grain is separated from the chaff. All the dust and debris falls through the meshes of the sieve, while the good grain remains behind. This is a necessary instrument and a necessary work. Until the wheat is separated from the chaff, it is not fit for making bread.

Our Lord Jesus used that process to describe what is done when Satan is permitted to tempt and try God's elect. But we

must never imagine that Satan has his way. He never does. The sifting work is God's. He simply uses Satan to do it. — *“For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth”* (Amos 9:9).

We are sifted when we are put into circumstances that try our faith. Throughout our lives, we must be sifted. The sifting process does not change anything. It simply separates the wheat from the chaff. There are many sieves by which the precious grain is separated from the worthless chaff. Let me mention just four.

**1. Prosperity** — The sieve of prosperity is one means by which people are sifted. By prosperity, many who once appeared to have true faith in Christ have erred from the faith, proving themselves to be reprobate (1 Timothy 6:10).

Job tells us that though they have great wealth and live in great ease, though they have all that they can desire in their hands, *“their good is not in their hand...They are as stubble before the wind, and chaff that the storm carrieth away”* (Job 21:16-18). David tells us that he was envious at the prosperity of the wicked, until he went into the house of God and understood what God had done to them by making them prosperous. — *“Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction”* (Psalm 73:18).

Nothing is more dangerous than the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. By this sieve, God sifts many and makes manifest whether their religion is true or false. The false, because of the love of money and the care of this world, when they have opportunity to gain what they really love, will, like Demas, forsake Christ, *“having loved this present world”* (2 Timothy 4:10). The true believer, when he is enriched like Abraham, or like Job in his later end, uses that which God has given him to worship, serve, and honor his God.

**2. Adversity** — A second means of sifting is the sieve of adversity. This sieve tries both those who have not

been tried in the sieve of prosperity and those who have survived it. Many who are poor would be ruined if they were suddenly, or even gradually made rich. And many who are rich would be ruined if they became impoverished. But there are many other adversities by which God separates the wheat from the chaff (Sickness — Domestic Trouble — A Foul Tempered Wife — A Neglectful and Abusive Husband — A Heart Breaking Child — An Adulterous Spouse — Bereavement).

**3. Soul Trouble** — Another means of sifting is the sieve of soul trouble. Tribulations within can be far more difficult to endure than those from without. What soul trouble Peter was about to experience! The sieve would cause him such anguish and pain as no one can comprehend, except those who experience it. He went out and wept bitterly because, having denied his Savior with oaths, (if I perceive the matter correctly), he thought he had been nothing but a hypocrite. He thought everything was over for him. He said to the other disciples, “*I go a fishing.*” — “I’m going back to being a fisherman.” How painful, how troublesome, how trying it is to discover the evil of our hearts! How painful, how troublesome, how trying it is to be suddenly assaulted with the unbelief, infidelity, obscenities, blasphemies, and rebellion of our depraved nature!

The children of darkness seem to always walk in the light. But how often the children of light walk in darkness, with no light shining upon our path, with no sweet manifestations of our Savior and His grace, groaning and sighing with tears, tears that appear to be unseen and groans that seem to be unheard by our God! What a painful sifting we get by the sieve of soul trouble! Yet, I have no doubt that if Peter could sit down beside you and talk to you about these things, he would tell you that even these bitter things shall prove sweet works of God’s wondrous grace for you. In fact, he has done just that (1 Peter 1:1-9).

**4. Temptation** — Often we are sifted in one hand by the

sieve of soul trouble and in the other by the sieve of temptation. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Aaron were sifted by the fear of man. Rachel was sifted by envy and jealousy. Moses was sifted by impatience and a hot temper. David was sifted by lust and power. Solomon was sifted by women and idolatry. Hezekiah was sifted by pride.

Read through the Book of God. You will not find any believer whose name is recorded upon the pages of Inspiration who was not sifted in the sieve of temptation. But there are more severe temptations than these, by which Satan is allowed to sift God's saints. How often have you been tempted by inward doubts and questions that you would never dare talk about, questions and doubts by which many have finally been overcome? — Questions and doubts regarding God's existence, Christ's deity, the Word of God, the love of God, the work of Christ, God's goodness, God's providence! How often have you felt within you an urge to scream out from your very soul, "Enough! I cannot go on. I go a fishing," all the while weeping bitterly in your soul because of it! These are all sieves through which we must and shall be sifted, as long as we are in this world.

### Our Savior's Intercession

Enough of that. — Let me show you about something indescribably better than Satan's desire and the pain of being sifted. Yet, were it not for the experience of being sifted, we could never appreciate the great mercy and grace of our Savior's intercession. In verse 32 our Savior says to Peter, and to you, and to me, to every sinner chosen in His love, redeemed by His blood, called by His Spirit, and saved by His grace, — "*But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.*"

The Lord Jesus did not pray for Judas. He was the son of perdition. Therefore, when he was sifted, he fell through the sieve and fell into hell. Our Savior did not pray for the world. But, blessed be His name, He says to us who believe, "*I have prayed*

*for thee!*" Were it not for that fact, you and I would fall through the sieve, just like Judas, and fall with him into everlasting hell. But that shall never happen, no matter how often, how long, or how severely we are sifted. If Christ has prayed for us that our faith fail not, our faith shall not fail and we shall not fall into hell!

Read John 17 again, and remembering how He has prayed for you and prays for you, lift your heart to heaven with grateful praise.

When we are sifted, though Satan seeks to destroy our faith, though he seeks to rip us from the heart and hand of God our Savior, all he does is separate the wheat from the chaff. The only thing that falls through the sieve is the dirt, debris, chaff, and rubbish of self-righteousness and legal religion, self-confidence and vainglory, self-reliance and presumed strength, carnal wisdom, and pride and judgmental severity

That which falls through the sieve is everything of an evil, earthly, carnal nature. Everything that is not implanted by our God in our souls. Everything that God himself has not breathed into our hearts, and made known to us by the power and grace of His Spirit fails us in the time of sifting. Everything fails except our God-given faith in Christ! Our Savior said, "*Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up*" (Matthew 15:13).

What sweet words these are: — "*But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not!*" What does faith do when we are sifted? How does faith react to the sifting? Faith clings the more firmly to Christ alone! In fact, it is by our being sifted that our Lord calls for us to trust him the more (John 13:36-14:3). Faith hopes more completely in Christ alone, "*Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*" Faith loves Christ more perfectly as the only and all-sufficient Author and Finisher of our faith, as the only and all-sufficient Savior of our souls, as our only and all-sufficient Refuge and Hiding Place. These things are not hindered or hurt by the sifting, but shine forth more brightly. Peter, when he was sifted, did not cease to love and trust his Savior, but loved Him and trusted Him more completely and with far greater humility than he had known or could have known

before (John 21:15-17).

## Benefits of Being Sifted

Our Savior said to Peter, “*and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*” He did not say, “If you are converted,” but “*when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren,*” assuring us that with every sifting, we shall be converted into instruments of greater usefulness.

Some have drawn the ridiculous conclusion from this statement that Peter was not converted before! That is not the meaning of our Lord’s words. The Lord Jesus had assured Peter that his confession of faith was made as the result of the revelation of grace, that his name was written in heaven, and that his sins were forgiven, and had sent him forth as a preacher of the Gospel.

The meaning of our Lord’s words is, “when you are restored and brought back by My mercy, when you are brought forth out of the furnace like purified gold, strengthen your brethren.” Now, he was fit to minister to others. Now, he was to be made a blessing to others. Now, through his weakness, he was made strong, strong enough to strengthen his brethren.

Peter was a far better man after his sifting than before, and a far better and more useful preacher than he could otherwise have been. How he strengthened his brethren and continues to strengthen his brethren to this day! His boldness as a preacher inspired boldness in others. Peter’s utter devotion to Christ and His people, after his sifting, is held forth in the Book of God as an example for us to follow. What strength has been and is given to his brethren by the epistles he was inspired to write for our learning, reminding us of the boundless mercy and grace of God flowing to us from electing love and blood atonement, pointing us to Him who “*bear our sin in His own body on the tree,*” and setting our hearts upon Christ’s coming and upon the world to come!

May God the Holy Spirit seal the Savior’s word to your heart

and mine by His grace. — “*Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*”

“Lord, why is this?’ I trembling cried;  
Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?  
`Tis in this way,’ the Lord replied,  
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

“These inward trials I employ,  
From self and pride to set thee free;  
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,  
That thou mayst seek thine all in Me.”

# Chapter 128

## “He was reckoned among the transgressors.”

### Luke 22:31-38

“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired [to have] you, that he may sift [you] as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take [it], and likewise [his] scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here [are] two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough” (Luke 22:31-38).

There are many things revealed in these verses that we need to read often and lay to heart, asking God the Holy Spirit to graciously and effectually apply them to us continually.

1. Our great enemy, Satan, the prince of darkness, constantly seeks the everlasting destruction of our souls. He desires to have us. He is “*a roaring lion, seeking*

whom he may devour.” He is “*the accuser of the brethren.*” He constantly works evil in the world, among men, and in the churches of Christ.

2. The great and only security of our souls from the adversary is our Lord Jesus Christ, His power, His grace, His sacrifice, and His mediation and intercession. He says to His own, “*I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not*” (v. 32). “*They that are with Him [in heaven] are called, and chosen, and faithful*” (Revelation 17:14) because He has made them so.

3. When God’s elect fall, they shall be converted. The Lord Jesus said to Peter, “*when thou art converted.*” There was no possibility that Peter might not be restored (Malachi 3:6). “*A just man falleth seven times and riseth up again*” because the Lord raises him up by His grace (Proverbs 24:16), “*for the LORD upholdeth him with His hand*” (Psalm 37:24).

4. We, who experience God’s grace, ought to take great pleasure in helping one another, especially counting it our privilege and honor to help those who are fallen. — “*When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*” (Galatians 6:1-2).

5. Learn this too: We ought to devote all to Christ, and use every reasonable means at our disposable for our Master, to faithfully serve Him (vv. 35-36).

“And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take *it*, and likewise *his* scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.”

Our Lord’s words here are not to be taken literally, but as a proverbial saying. Until our Savior comes again, we are to make a diligent use of everything God has given us. We are not to

expect miracles to be performed to save us from trouble and labor. We are not to expect bread to fall from heaven into our mouths, if we refuse to work for it. We are not to expect difficulties and enemies to be overcome, if we will not wrestle, and struggle and take pains. J. C. Ryle wrote...

“We shall do well to lay to heart our Lord’s words in this place, and to act habitually on the principle which they contain. Let us labor, and toil, and give, and speak, and act, and write for Christ, as if all depended on our exertions. And yet let us never forget that success depends entirely on God’s blessing! To expect success by our own ‘purse’ and ‘sword’ is pride and self-righteousness. But to expect success without the ‘purse and sword’ is presumption and fanaticism. Let us do as Jacob did when he met his brother Esau. He used all innocent means to conciliate and appease him. But when he had done all, he spent all night in prayer (Genesis 32:1-24).”

Those are all very important lessons. We need to be often reminded of them. But, in this study I want to focus your attention on our Savior’s statement in verse 37. — *“For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end.”*

## Must Be

First, the Lord Jesus says, *“that this that is written must yet be accomplished.”* The Scriptures speak of many things that simply must be; they must be because the Lord God has ordained them and declared that they must be. Let me remind you of just a couple of them.

There is a multitude of sinners in this world, who are the objects of God’s everlasting love and grace in Christ, who must be born again (John 3:7). The Lord Jesus did not simply say to Nicodemus, “You really should be born again,” or “You need to be born again,” or “I urge you to be born again.” Our Savior said to Nicodemus — *“Ye must be born again!”*

This is not a matter of speculation on my part. John tells us later on in his Gospel (19:38-40) that Nicodemus came with Joseph of Arimathaea to beg the body of the Lord Jesus from Pilate, and made considerable sacrifice for His burial. At the appointed time of love and grace, Nicodemus was, according to the purpose of God, born again.

I take Nicodemus to be a representative of all God's elect. The Lord Jesus says, concerning all chosen sinners, "*Ye must be born again;*" and they shall, every one of them, at God's appointed time, be born again. This is a matter of absolute certainty, because it is a matter of absolute necessity.

Why must God's elect be born again? What necessity is there for this? God's elect must be born again because we need it. — Though chosen and redeemed, though predestinated to eternal salvation, none of God's elect can ever be saved apart from the new birth. Here are seven clearly revealed reasons why God's elect must be born again.

1. We must be born again because we were all born wrong the first time (Psalms 51:5; 58:3). Because we were born wrong the first time, unless we are born again, we can neither see nor enter into the kingdom of God.

2. Every one of the elect must be born again because God, who cannot lie, promised it, before the world began (Titus 1:2; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 2 Timothy 1:9).

3. All the chosen must be born again because election demands it (2 Thessalonians 2: 13-14). If even one of those chosen to salvation should fail to obtain salvation, then God's election is meaningless, His purpose is useless, His love is worthless, and His Word is comfortless! If God cannot be trusted to do this, to save the people He purposed to save from eternity, He cannot be trusted to do anything (Ephesians 1:3-6).

4. God's elect must all be born again, because predestination arranged it. Predestination is God's

appointment and arrangement of all things from eternity to secure the salvation of His chosen (Romans 8:28-30).

5. Every one of God's elect must, without exception, be born again, because the sin-atonement blood of the Lord Jesus Christ has obtained it and demands it (Hebrews 9:12).

6. Every chosen, blood-bought sinner in this world must be born again, because our God wills it. It is written, "*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). Someone may ask, "How do you know that is what 2 Peter 3:9 teaches?" We know because 2 Peter 3:15 tells us so. — "*The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.*"

7. And all the chosen, all who were predestinated to eternal life, all the redeemed, all of them must be born again, because the Holy Spirit was sent here to do it (John 6:37-40, 44-45, 63).

In John 4:4 we read that the Son of God must go through Samaria, because the time of love had come for a chosen sinner in Samaria. When the appointed time of love has come, the time in which the chosen, redeemed sinner shall be born again, then our great God and compassionate Savior "*must needs*" go to where the chosen, redeemed sinner is and give life to the object of His love; and He shall. Election marked the house into which Christ must come. Predestination set the time of His coming. Blood atonement paved the road on which He would come. Providence brings Him to the appointed house at the appointed time. Efficacious grace brings Him in (Isaiah 55:11).

Here, in Luke 22:37 the Son of God tells us of the absolute necessity of His death upon the cursed tree as our Substitute. — "*This that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors.*" The Son of God must die as he did, because the Scriptures must be fulfilled (Psalm 22; Isaiah

53). The particular passage He quotes here is Isaiah 53:12.

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

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world with a commission, on a mission of mercy, under the bondage of His own voluntary suretyship engagements, which He assumed for us as the Surety of the everlasting covenant (Hebrews 7:22; Matthew 1:21).

The death of our Lord Jesus Christ was no accident. It was not something which came to pass because of man’s free will, or because the Jews would not let Him be their king! The Lord Jesus died at Calvary, because He must die at Calvary. As He Himself declared, “*The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day*” (Luke 9:22).

## The Necessity

The word “*must*” means “necessary” or “binding.” It is used to describe that which is absolutely vital. Why? What necessity was there for the death of the Son of God upon the cursed tree? Why must this Holy One be made sin for us? Why must this Savior be put to death? Our Savior has told us that His death as our Substitute was necessary, because the Scriptures, which declared hundreds of years earlier, “*He was reckoned among the transgressors,*” must be fulfilled. But there are other things that made His sacrificial, sin-atoning death upon the cursed tree necessary.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ must die at Jerusalem as He did, because God the Father purposed it from eternity (Acts 2:23).
2. Our dear Savior had to die at Jerusalem, in order to

fulfil His covenant engagements for us. Our Lord Jesus Christ voluntarily assumed all responsibility for our souls in the covenant of grace; but once He assumed that responsibility, He must fulfil it. He is honor bound to do so (Genesis 43:8-9; John 10:18; Acts 13:29).

3. It was absolutely necessary for the Lord Jesus Christ to die as He did upon the cursed tree, lifted up from the earth, in order for the holy Lord God to save us from our sins (Romans 3:24-26; John 3:14-17). If God would save us from our sins, He could only do it this way, because righteousness must be maintained, sin must be punished, justice must be satisfied, forgiveness must be legitimate, and the love of God must be blameless.

The Lord God was not, in any way, compelled, by anything outside Himself, to save anyone. But, having determined to save some of Adam's fallen race, He could not do so except upon the grounds of justice satisfied. He was not compelled to save us. But, having chosen to save us, He could not do so except by the sacrifice of His own dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. — *“By mercy and truth iniquity is purged.”*

## Have an End

Now, look at the last line of Luke 22:37. Our Savior says, *“the things concerning Me,”* all of them, all the things written of Him in the Old Testament Scripture, all things decreed from eternity concerning Him, He said, *“have an end.”* That is to say, everything decreed, purposed, and written concerning Me have a specific design, goal, and intent, a conclusion, a termination, a predestined result, and a divinely ordained finality.

When He who knew no sin was made sin for us, when He bearing our sins in His own body on the tree was made a curse for us, when He had suffered all the fulness of God's wrath and justice as our Substitute, our blessed Savior cried, *“It is finished!...Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”* Then, He reverently bowed His head as an obedient servant, whose work

was finished, presenting Himself to the Father, and gave up the ghost. At that moment, all things decreed and written of Him had achieved their goal and predestined result with finality, and came to their end, their conclusion, and their termination (Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22:12; Isaiah 53:5-12; Daniel 9:25-26; Zechariah 12:10; 13:6-7).

All the requirements of His engagements as our covenant Surety, all His obligation as our Surety ended. All the shadows, types, promises, and prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures ended. The law of God ended (Romans 10:4). The fury, wrath, and vengeance of Divine justice was ended for Him and for all His people. Jehovah declares to His chosen, “*fury is not in me*” (Isaiah 27:4). Judgment ended for His redeemed. Our sin and guilt before God ended (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; 2:13-17; 1 Peter 4:1-2; Romans 8:1).

How we ought to rejoice and give thanks to our God for the fact that the designed purpose of our Savior in coming into this world had its end (Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 10:10-14). — “*Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him*” (John 13:31).

## Another Must

In the light of all this, let me show you one more thing that must be. In John 3:29-30 we read...

“He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I *must* decrease.”

Christ is the Bridegroom. — “*He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom.*” Gospel preachers are friends of the Bridegroom. We stand before the Bridegroom. We listen for the Bridegroom’s voice. We rejoice to hear His voice. Our joy is fulfilled when we are used of God to bring the bride and the Bridegroom together.

And the Bridegroom’s friend, every true servant of God, is

anxious to turn honor and attention away from himself to Christ, the Bridegroom. This is the prayer, desire, and determination of every true, faithful servant of God. — *“He must increase; but I must decrease.”* Christ is from heaven and is heavenly. We are just men of the earth, and earthly (v. 31). We will soon fade away. Christ is eternal. Christ is Himself the Revelation of God. We are just His messengers (v. 32). Christ has the Spirit without measure. We have the Spirit as He is measured to us (v. 34). To believe me or any other man is meaningless. To believe him is to seal this fact to your own heart, that God is true (v. 33). Christ must increase, because the Father has put all things in His hands (v. 35). Christ must increase, because He alone is our Savior. — *“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*

*“He must increase; but I must decrease.”* The more I decrease, the more I delight just to stand before Him and hear His voice. And the more I stand before Him and hear His voice, the more He will increase before me, and I decrease before Him.

Oh, let Christ increase and me decrease! We cannot be occupied with more than one thing at a time. Let us ever be occupied with Christ, and not with ourselves! The more we are occupied with Him, the less we shall be occupied with ourselves.

Humility is not something we cultivate. Rather, it is something that comes from beholding the Lord Jesus Christ. The more I try to be humble, the more proud I become. But the more I stand in His presence, hear His voice, and behold Him, the more I am occupied with Him, the more humbled I am before Him. — *“He must increase; but I must decrease!”*

# Chapter 129

## Agony in Gethsemane

Luke 22:39-46

“And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” (Luke 22:39-46).

We come now with the Son of God into his favorite place of prayer, the garden of Gethsemane. The word Gethsemane means “olive press.” What a fitting place Gethsemane was for the events which transpired on this dark, dark night. Here, the Lord of glory wept in agony of soul, prayed with a heavy, broken heart, and began to have his soul crushed in anticipation of being made sin for us. So heavy was the burden of his heart that the pores of his flesh poured with a bloody sweat!

I never read this passage and its parallels in Mathew, Mark, and John without a great sense of utter ignorance and inability. How can a mortal man of sinful flesh comprehend what our

Master experienced in Gethsemane? It is simply impossible. I will not attempt to expound the verses before us. That I know is a task too great for the man writing these lines. This passage contains things the wisest of faithful, godly men cannot explain. We will simply look at our Savior and his disciples as they are set before us in this passage and, I trust, learn the obvious lessons here set before us by God the Holy Spirit.

### **Our Savior's Agony**

What was the cause of our Savior's agony? What was the cause of this great heaviness and sorrow, this grief and agony of our blessed Redeemer's soul? What was it that crushed our Master's heart? What so greatly disturbed him? It was not the fear of physical pain, the fear of death, or even the fear of dying upon the cross.

It was not death on the cross that our Redeemer agonized over in Gethsemane. He stated very emphatically that he came for the purpose of dying as our Substitute upon the cursed tree. We should read the record of our Savior's agony here in light of his earlier temptation in the wilderness. After that temptation, Satan left him for a season, awaiting another opportunity to assault him (Luke 4:13). In Gethsemane the prince of this world launched his final assault upon the Lord Jesus. Just as he assaulted Adam in the garden of Eden, he assaulted the last Adam in the garden of Gethsemane. In Gethsemane the serpent bruised the heel of the woman's Seed, and in Gethsemane the woman's Seed again overthrew his assault.

That which crushed our Savior's heart was the anticipation of being made sin for us. The heavy, heavy burden which crushed his very soul was the enormous load of sin and guilt, the sin and guilt of all God's elect which was about to be made his. Our Savior's great sorrow was caused by his anticipation of being made sin for us. "It was," wrote J.C. Ryle, "a sense of the unutterable weight of our sins and transgressions which were then specially laid upon him." He who knew no sin was about to be made sin for us. He who is the only man who really knows

what sin is, the only man who sees sin as God sees it was about to become sin. He who is the holy, harmless, undefiled Lamb of God was about to be made a curse for us. The holy Son of God was about to be forsaken by his Father.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, “*began to be sore amazed*”, to be in great consternation and astonishment, at the sight of all the sins of his people coming upon him, at the black storm of divine wrath that was gathering thick over him, at the sword of justice which was brandished against him, and at the curses of God’s holy law and inflexible justice, which, like thunderbolts of vengeance from heaven, were directed at him. In consideration of these things, our Savior began “*to be very heavy!*” That which crushed our Savior’s very heart and soul was the very thing for which he came into the world: — the prospect of what he must endure as our Substitute.

The message of the Word of God, in its entirety, is Substitution. The Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, our Mediator and Surety, died in our place, in the place of God’s elect as our Substitute. By his own blood, when he was made sin for us, when he was slain in our stead, he satisfied the justice of God for us, magnified his holy law, made it honorable, and purchased for us the complete, everlasting forgiveness of all our sins. He died, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Christ died at Calvary so that God might be both just and the Justifier of all who believe. It is written, “*By mercy and truth iniquity is purged*” (Pro. 16:7; Rom. 3:19-28; Eph. 1:7). Since the Lord Jesus Christ died as the sinners’ Substitute, since he has met and fully satisfied the justice of God for us, believing sinners have no reason ever to fear condemnation by God, accusation before God, or separation from God (Rom. 8:1-4, 31-39).

It was the enormous load of our sin and guilt which crushed our Savior’s heart in Gethsemane (Isa. 53:4-6).

## Sin’s Ignominy

What a horrible, monstrous, ignominious thing sin must be! Nothing so displays the exceeding sinfulness of sin as the death

of our Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. When the holy Lord God found sin on his own darling Son, he killed him. God poured out all the unmitigated fury of his wrath upon his own darling Son, when he found sin upon him, and forsook him. Those facts ought to startle every human being. They assure us that if God finds sin on us, he will do the same thing to us forever. Let us never look lightly upon sin.

### **Christ's Prayer**

What is the meaning of our Lord's prayer in verse 42? — "*Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*" In his time of great heaviness, sorrow, and distress, we find our Lord Jesus in prayer. What an example he sets before us. The first one to whom we should turn in every time of trouble is our heavenly Father. Our God should be the first to hear the words of our complaints. He may or may not relieve us of our trouble; but it is good for our souls for us to unburden our hearts at the throne of grace. There, and only there will we discover the all-sufficiency of his grace (Hebrews 4:16; James 5:13).

But what was our Lord praying for in the garden of Gethsemane? Let us never rush in where angels dare not tread. I will not entertain idle curiosity about the things of God, especially when discussing the heart-wrenching agony of soul endured by the Son of God to save us. Still, this agony of soul, which the Lord Jesus endured for us, is recorded in all four gospel narratives. Matthew and Mark both tell us that our Savior uttered this prayer in much the same words three times. Luke adds the details about his bloody sweat and an angel coming to minister to him.

"And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou *wilt*. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed,

saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.” (Matthew 26:39-42)

“And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (vv. 41-44).

While the apostle John does not specifically deal with our Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane, he does give us a hint at the meaning of his prayer. In John 12 we see our Savior in a similar position and experience six days before the betrayal in Gethsemane (John 12:23-33). Here we see our Savior in great agony of soul. His agony was clearly related to his death at Calvary. Yet, he set his face steadfastly toward the cross without flinching.

While he certainly has his death at Calvary in mind, our Lord Jesus, obviously, was not asking that he might be kept from that appointment for which he came into this world. He had come to this place on purpose, that he might be betrayed by Judas, arrested, and hanged upon the cursed tree by the hands of wicked men, to fulfil the will of his Father as our covenant Surety (Hebrews 10:1-10).

If the Lord Jesus was not praying to be saved from dying in our place as our sin-atonement Substitute, what was he praying for his Father to do here? Our Lord was here once more under the assault of hell. Satan was making his last effort to keep him from fulfilling his Father’s purpose of grace in redemption. He was doing everything he could to keep the Seed of the woman from crushing his head.

I have no doubt at all that our Savior, being overwhelmed with the prospect of being made sin, in this state of soul agony, was (as a man) fearful of dying before he had finished his work,

before he reached the cross. He was fearful of dying in the garden of Gethsemane (Hebrews 5:7).

We must never forget that our Lord Jesus is both God and man in one glorious person. As God he could never know fear. Yet, he could not be a man tempted in all points like as we are if he did not know fear.

These two distinct natures in Christ, the divine and the human, are obvious throughout the gospel narratives, especially in those passages dealing with his temptations, sufferings, and death. Here in Gethsemane we see the man Christ Jesus begging for relief from this great trial of agony. Yet, his submission and resignation to the Father's will is submission and resignation to his own will as God.

*"The hour"* from which our Lord prayed for release was not the hour for which he had come into the world, but this hour in the garden. *"The cup"* he prayed might pass from him was not the cup of his Father's wrath to be poured out upon him at Calvary. That cup Jehovah's Servant took with determinate purpose and resolve. The cup he wanted to pass from him was the fear of dying in the garden before he could take the cup of his Father's wrath and drink it for us.

### **Our Lord's Example**

What a remarkable example our Lord Jesus set before us of submission to the will of God. — *"Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done"* (v. 42).

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Peter 2:21-24)

This is the highest measure of practical godliness and holiness. Let men brag and boast to themselves, as they may,

about their imaginary *godly* deeds. The surrender of my will to God's will in all things is godliness. Godliness is bearing patiently whatever my Father sends, desiring only what my God has purposed, wanting nothing but what he wills, preferring pain to pleasure, if that is my Father's will. Nothing can make us happier in this world than submission to the will of God. And nothing brings us so much heartache and misery in this world as having our own way. May God give us grace to willingly submit to his will: his eternal will of predestination, his revealed will in scripture, and his accomplished will in providence. Let us ever say, with Eli of old, "*It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.*"

### **Our Shame**

What shameful, fickle, slothful, sinful creatures the very best of God's saints are in this world. We have a painful illustration of this fact in the slothful indifference of Peter, James, and John in verses 45-46. — "*And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*" But we have an even more painful illustration of it in ourselves. We all far too often sleep when we ought to pray, ignore our Lord when he is near, and quickly let slip those things we ought to hold fast.

All who are born of God, so long as we live in this world, are people with two diametrically opposite, warring natures (Romans 7:14-23; Galatians 5:17; Psalms 73). The spirit is ready and willing; but the flesh is sinful and weak. Therefore, we must ever watch and pray. We must always be on guard, as soldiers in hostile, enemy territory, knowing that there is a malicious traitor within. We must fight the battles daily. We must wage warfare against our flesh daily. Our rest is yet to come (1 Thessalonians 5:14-24).

### **Give Thanks**

If you will read Mark's account (Mark 14:41-42), you will see what great reason we have to give thanks to our dear Savior for his steadfast resolve as our Surety. — "*And he cometh the third*

*time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough.*” Our Lord Jesus was saying, “It is done. This trial is over. I have finished the work of my obedience.”

“*The hour is come.*” — Now the appointed hour of my death, the appointed hour of your redemption is come. Now I must finish the work my Father gave me to do for you. I must go yonder to die in your place!

“*Behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand.*” — Nothing could keep our Savior from Calvary. Nothing could keep him from dying for us. Nothing could prevent him from accomplishing that death at Jerusalem for which he had come into this world. And, blessed be his name, nothing can keep him from saving those whom he redeemed with his own precious blood at Calvary!

Did you catch those last three words in verse 41? — “*It is enough!*” He said, “*Sleep on now, take your rest it is enough!*” His obedience is enough. His blood is enough. His grace is enough. He is enough. Therefore, we can take our rest in him.

# Chapter 130

## The Betrayal

### Luke 22:3-6)

“Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude” (Luke 22:3-6)..

That which is contained in these verses is both sad and solemn. It is a subject full of serious warning to every hypocrite. Yet, it is a subject that is instructive and comforting to believing sinners. Here the Holy Spirit describes the betrayal of our Savior by Judas Iscariot, showing us how our sovereign God and Savior used the deeds of the most infamous man in history to accomplish his purpose of grace in the redemption of his elect and to fulfil the Scriptures in his death.

### Judas Iscariot

*“Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot.”* — First, let me tell you something about this horrible man, Judas Iscariot. There were four men named Jude, or Judas, in the New Testament.

1. Jude, the brother of James and half brother of our Savior, who wrote the Epistle of Jude (Matthew 13:55). This man was the Judas who asked the Savior, *“Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto*

*the world?"* (John 14:22).

2. There is another Judas mentioned in Acts 9:11, who lived on Straight St. in Damascus, at whose house Ananias met Saul of Tarsus, after the Lord Jesus had revealed himself in that man chosen of God to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

3. There was a third Jude, or Judas, who was surnamed Barsabas. He was sent by the apostles to the church at Antioch, after the conference at Jerusalem (Acts 15:22-30).

4. And here is Judas Iscariot, the traitor, the betrayer of our Lord. His name was Judas; but he was, by divine providence, surnamed Iscariot, which means "the man of murder." It had been better for this man if he had never been born. Of him our Savior said, "*The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born*" (Mark 14:21).

### ***"Then"***

*"Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot."* — It is important to notice the time God the Holy Spirit identifies for us when Satan is here said to have entered into Judas. This was two days before the passover. It happened while our Savior was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper (Matthew 26:2-17; Mark 14:1-11). In fact, Mark's account seems to indicate that the thing Satan used to trigger Judas' wickedness was the devotion of the woman who anointed the Savior with precious spikenard for his burial, and the Master's commendation of her good work. Immediately after our Savior commended this woman and her work, Judas "*went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them*" (Mark 14:10).

John tells us that this happened before the supper in Simon's house ended (John 13:2). While they were at the table in Simon's house, you will remember, the Lord Jesus arose from

the supper and washed his disciples' feet. (This was not at the Lord's Supper, but at the supper in Simon's house in Bethany.) Then, the Savior told the disciples that one of them would betray him. When they wondered which of them would do the horrible deed, he said, "*He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly*" (John 13:26-27). Though the Lord Jesus had spoken very plainly, the disciples failed to realize that he had identified Judas as the betrayer. But Judas "*having received the sop went immediately out*" to betray him (John 13:30).

Immediately following the supper at Bethany, while Judas was making his dastardly deal with the chief priests, the Lord Jesus sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to prepare for the passover. Then, when the appointed hour arrived, "*he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him,*" to keep the passover feast (Luke 22:14; Matthew 26:20; Mark 14:17). Our Savior kept the passover feast with his disciples, as was required by the law (Luke 22:15-18). In verses 19-20 he established the gospel ordinance of the Lord's Supper, by which God's saints in this gospel age remember the Savior and symbolically "*show the Lord's death, till he come*" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

### **Judas at the Table**

I have said all that because I want you to see, and to see clearly, that Judas was at the table with the Lord Jesus and his disciples when the Lord's Supper was established. In verses 21 and 22 we are plainly told that after making his hellish deal to betray the Son of God, Judas was present with the twelve and kept the first observance of the Lord's Supper with them. The Lord Jesus said, "*Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!*" What a base, crass, hard-hearted hypocrite Judas must have been! Apparently, he came only to cover his tracks; but there he is sitting with the Son of God and his apostles as the Savior established the blessed ordinance of sweet communion, just as though he was part of the

communion!

This is important because there are multitudes who would have us “fence the table,” or not observe it at all, lest someone eat the bread and wine with us who is an unbeliever. Some would even keep other believers from the table. Such practices are terribly evil.

Be sure you understand what the Scriptures teach regarding the Lord’s Supper. Like believer’s baptism, it is a blessed, gospel ordinance of worship; and, like baptism, it is an ordinance to be observed by believers only. If you do not trust Christ as your Savior, if you do not discern the Lord’s body (That is to say, “If you do not know why Christ came into this world and what he accomplished, if you do not know your need of him as your sin-atoning Substitute.”) you must not join God’s children at the Lord’s Table. The ordinance is not for you. To eat the bread and drink the wine without such God-given, spiritual discernment is to eat and drink damnation to yourself.

But, if you are a believer, if you do trust Christ alone as your Lord and Savior, the Table is prepared and set for you. No believer is unworthy to receive the bread and wine in remembrance of the Savior. In fact, every believer is specifically told to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of the Savior, and to do so often (Matthew 26:26-28). The observance of the Lord’s Supper is no more optional than believer’s baptism. And it is just as evil to refuse one of the Lord’s children their place at the Table, as it would be to refuse baptism to one to whom he has given faith in Christ.

Who makes the decision? Who decides who shall eat the bread and drink the wine? The Scriptures tell us plainly. Each person must examine himself. You, and you alone, are to determine whether you are a sinner whose only hope of salvation and eternal life is the crucified Son of God. It is not the pastor’s responsibility, or the responsibility of the church’s elders or deacons. It is the responsibility of the individual, and no one else, to determine whether he does or does not trust Christ as his Savior.

The Lord Jesus knew that Judas was a devil from the beginning, and knew that he had already made arrangements to betray him for thirty pieces of silver. He spoke so pointedly to Judas about these things, that he had no excuse for his hellish hypocrisy. But the Master did nothing to keep that devil from eating the bread and drinking the wine.

## "One of the Twelve"

We are told that Judas was "*of the number of the twelve*" (v. 3). He was "*one of the twelve*" (v. 47). Those twelve men formed the most elite group of men ever to walk across the face of the earth. Yet, "*one of the twelve*" apostles of Christ was Judas Iscariot, Judas the murderous traitor. When the Lord chose *Judas* to the office of an apostle, he knew he was a devil (John 6:70-71). When the Lord Jesus commissioned the others, Judas was commissioned with them. When our Savior sent out the *twelve* to cast out devils, heal the sick, and preach the kingdom of God, Judas was among them (Luke 9:1-6). It seems to me that Judas must have even performed the same miracles that the other apostles performed; else he may have been detected by them.

## Gracious Designs

All this was done, though the Lord Jesus knew exactly who and what Judas was. Rather than questioning these things, we ought to immediately recognize that our Savior had wise and gracious designs in them. Judas was a man specifically raised up to stand as a glaring beacon to warn all men, telling all that outward religion without inward grace is not only useless, but damning. Judas was chosen to be a preacher and even an apostle. Without question, he preached exactly the same doctrine as Peter, James, and John, the very doctrine that Christ preached. But Judas was a devil. He was never born again. He was never called to life and faith in Christ by God the Holy Spirit. Judas was never made a partaker of Christ and a partaker of the grace of God.

He was nothing but an outward, empty hearted professor of

faith in Christ, not a possessor of grace. He was an apostle (a messenger of God) in name only. Peter said he was “*numbered with*” the apostles and had “*obtained part*” of their ministry (Acts 1:17). He obtained part, just an outside part of the apostles’ ministry, no more. He had the name and the office, the duties and the doctrine, the fame and the functions of an apostle, but nothing more. He had no grace in his heart and no gifts of the Spirit. Those who heard him preach heard cold, dry, empty echoes of a cold, dry, empty heart.

I fear there are multitudes like Judas today who fill the pulpits of churches. They are ordained by men, but not by God the Holy Spirit. They are talented, but not gifted with grace. They are forceful, but not faithful. Their doctrine may be profound and precise, but it is not pure. It may elevate your thinking, but it will not edify your soul. It may swell your head, but it will not sanctify your heart.

Such a man was Judas. He was a devil from the beginning and remained a devil to the end, though he was numbered with, and constantly associated with the apostles to the end of his days, until the measure of his iniquity was filled. Then, he went “*to his own place*” (Acts 1:25). We should never be surprised by the appearance of such men, or surprised that they go undetected, even by the faithful (Matthew 7:22-23).

## No Harm

Judas also stands as a constant, blessed beacon of light, proclaiming forever that all Satan’s devices and all the deeds of even the most malicious men shall never hurt God’s cause, injure his people, or hinder the gospel. The Apostles were not hindered in their work because Judas was among them. The disciples were not harmed by his presence at the Table. Our Savior was not hindered, but only helped in his determination to redeem us by Judas’ betrayal. In fact, it was Judas’ fall from the number of the twelve that made room for the twelfth true apostle, the apostle Paul.

In choosing Judas to be an apostle and allowing a devil to sit

at the Lord's Table with his disciples our Savior assures us that his saints are not polluted or harmed in anyway because a Judas is among them. The Lord's true disciples did not lose a thing because Judas was among them. They had Christ with them. Their joy was not diminished because Judas was there.

If, indeed, the Lord Jesus meets with us when we gather to worship him as he promised (Matthew 18:20), we will suffer no loss if a devil dares try to hide himself from God among the sons of God (Job 1:6). If God the Holy Spirit will lead us "*by the footsteps of the flock*", where the Good Shepherd feeds his sheep (Song of Solomon 1:8), our souls shall be blessed with his flock, though there may be a goat or two among the sheep, or even a lion lying in wait. He will prepare a table for us, even in the presence of our enemies, anoint our heads with the oil of his grace, and cause our cups to run over.

## Wheat and Tares

Yes, our Savior had wise and gracious designs in his use of Judas. He knew that his church, so long as we are in this world, would never be free from false apostles, false preachers, and false prophets. And he knew that tares would grow together with the wheat until the harvest. Goats will ever be found among his sheep in this world. Wherever the good fish are gathered by the gospel net, carps will be gathered, too. And this is exactly according to his purpose. Yet, the "*precious and the vile*" are still perfectly distinct, and between them there is "*a great gulf fixed.*" Tares will never become wheat. Goats will never become sheep. And bad fish will never become good fish. The seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent cannot be mixed.

## Betrayed with a Kiss

Skip down to Luke 22:47. The Lord Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane. He has finished praying. When he arose from prayer, he found Peter, James, and John "*sleeping for sorrow*" (v. 45). When he did, he said, "*Rise and pray, lest ye enter into*

temptation” (v. 46). Read verses 47-54.

“And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him. Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness. Then took they him, and led *him*, and brought him into the high priest’s house.

## A Multitude

Here is a multitude of Roman soldiers armed with swords and spears, and Jews with the chief priests, with Judas leading the way. “*Judas was guide to them that took Jesus*” (Acts 1:16). But, why would such a huge multitude come to arrest one unarmed man? Were they afraid of him? It appears that they were. It is obvious that the soldiers, as well as the Jews, had heard that this man claimed to be more than a mere man. He claimed to be God in the flesh; and his disciples all worshipped him as God. We know that the soldiers were aware of this, because one of them later declared, “*Truly this man was the Son of God*” (Mark 15:39).

It is certain that none of the princes of this world really knew him, “*for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*” (1 Corinthians 2:8). Yet, these men knew that he openly claimed to be “*the Lord of Glory*,” and feared that he might be. And he showed them that their fears were justified (John 18:4-8). And, it is obvious that, though Judas was

determined to betray him, he was terrified of him. Matthew tells us that he told the soldiers as soon as they saw him kiss the Lord Jesus, they should hold him fast (Matthew 26:48).

## Total Depravity

Why did he use such precautions? There was in that devil of a man a terrifying conviction that Christ was more than man. He could not have forgotten the miracles of Christ. He had seen the Master escape from the hands of his enemies, when they sought to throw him over the hill of the city (Luke 4:29-31). Therefore, he told them to bind him and lead him away securely (Mark 14:44).

These men, all of them, must have been terrified as they led the Savior out of Gethsemane. They all had seen and heard enough that night to convince them that this man is God. Our Lord took the initiative, approaching them with not the slightest twinge of fear. He had declared, "*I AM*," and they fell away backward before him. He picked Malchus' right ear up off the ground and replaced it before their eyes.

They knew who they were dealing with, and must have been utterly terrified. Yet, such is the deadness and depravity of the human heart that sinners cannot act contrary to the evil determination of their own wicked hearts and wills, unless they are graciously compelled to do so by God the Holy Spirit. Even when stricken with terror, they cannot and will not repent, except God give them repentance. If we know, by the sweet experience of his grace, what it is to repent, what it is to trust Christ, our hearts ought to constantly bow before him with gratitude and dance before him with joy!

## Christ in Control

Though bound like a criminal, our Lord Jesus Christ was in absolute control, even of this mob. He was overruling their malice for his own glory that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.

Our sovereign Savior was, by the use of these wicked men, accomplishing the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures. He was taken by force, but not by the force of these men. He was taken captive by them by the force of his own determination to die in our place upon the cursed tree, and to do so exactly according to the Scriptures.

According to the Scripture, he had to be betrayed by one who was familiar with him and called his friend, one in whom he confided, one who had eaten of his bread (Psalm 41:9). According to the Scripture, the sacrifice for sin had to be bound. Therefore, our Savior voluntarily stretched out his hand to be bound by sinners (Psalm 118:27). As Isaac was voluntarily bound and laid upon the altar, our blessed Savior was, by his own voluntary will, bound by these wicked men that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

## Jews and Gentiles

This wicked band of murderous men was a mob of rebels, composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Though utterly unconscious of the fact, they were visibly and undeniably fulfilling that which was written of them in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Psalm hundreds of years earlier. We know that the actions of these men was the fulfillment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Psalm, because the Spirit of God specifically tells us that is the case in Acts 4:24-28.

“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”

## Brought to the High Priest

In verse 54 Luke says, “*Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest’s house.*” When they came to arrest our Savior in the Garden, it was the intention of this mob to deliver him up to the Romans, to give him a mock trial, and murder him. These soldiers did not come representing the Jews’ or their high priest. They were Roman soldiers. Why, then, did they take him first to the high priest?

Again, though they had no idea what they were doing, they acted directly contrary to their own inclinations to fulfill the purpose of our God. Roman soldiers would not willingly do anything just to please the despised Jews over whom they ruled. And they probably acted in direct disobedience to their orders. These men were the Roman governor’s soldiers. It is highly unlikely that the governor sent them out with orders to arrest the Lord Jesus and take him to the high priest’s house. It seems to me that he would have ordered them to bring the Lord Jesus directly to him.

Why, then, do you suppose they took him to the house of the high priest? If you will read the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Leviticus, you will see that the sacrifice for sin had to be brought first to the priest. Why did they bring Christ first into “*the high priest’s house*”? They did it that Christ might die for our sins according to the Scriptures, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.

Christ our Passover, our Sin-offering, our Sacrifice, had to be bound and led away, as all sacrifices under the law were, to the high priest. And both Jew and Gentile had to be involved in the great work. So they drug the Lord Jesus to the high priest, then to the Governor, and then to Pilate, and at last to Mount Calvary, where he was crucified by the hands of wicked men, according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, “*according to the Scriptures*” (Isa. 53:4-12).

### ***“His Own Place”***

When he had done that for which he was ordained, that for which his vile, base heart lusted, this hard, impenitent rebel, Judas, the

man of murder, went to his own place in hell, and that by his own hand. We are specifically told, “*Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place*” (Matthew 27:3-5; Acts 1:18-25).

What a horrible death Judas died! Being condemned in himself, he committed suicide, hanging himself. Then, “*falling headlong, he burst asunder, and all his bowels gushed out.*” What a spectacle! How just! Then he went to his own place in hell. Imagine if you dare, what has followed. — Throughout the unimaginable miseries of eternity, Judas is forced to endure, to the everlasting torment of his soul, the unceasing condemnation of his own guilty, damning conscience. In the screeches of the damned, this fire burns in his soul and this worm never dies, Judas’ own conscience ceaselessly screams, “Would God I had never been born! Would God I had never been born! I am justly damned forever! I am the man who betrayed the Lord of life and glory with a kiss!”

## Christ's Appointed Place

Yet, it was by the hand of Judas, the man of murder, that the Lord Jesus Christ, our blessed Savior, went to his appointed place, at his appointed time, and finished his appointed work as our Savior, justified us with his own blood, forever put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself, and obtained eternal redemption for us, dying “*for our sins according to the Scriptures.*”

## Our Own Place

The end result of all this is glorious. Because Christ took our place at Calvary, because he was made sin for us, we have been made the righteousness of God in him; and soon we shall be brought, by his omnipotent grace and immaculate mercy, into our own place with him in heaven at last!

What will your place be? Will you be brought down to your own place in hell by your own hands, by your willful, obstinate rebellion refusing to bow to the Son of God? Oh, may God

graciously save you from yourself by his grace, give you life and faith in his darling Son, and sweetly force you to enter into life eternal by Christ the Door. "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*" Trust the Son of God now; and soon he will bring you to your own place, the place prepared for you from the foundation of the world, and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

# Chapter 131

## A Great Sinner and His Great Savior

Luke 22:54-62

“Then took they him, and led [him], and brought him into the high priest’s house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this [fellow] also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:54-62).

Because it is describe in great detail by God the Holy Spirit in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it is obvious that Peter’s fall and his recovery by the Lord Jesus Christ is a matter of great importance, and one that we need to have repeatedly impressed upon our hearts and minds. May God the Holy Spirit be our Teacher as we go over the inspired history of this sad event. Here is the tremendously instructive record of a great sinner and his great

Savior.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God. Were it nothing but an uninspired book of religion written by men, the Gospel writers would never have told us that Peter, one of the Lord's apostles, denied his Master three times. What are we to learn from this sad, yet encouraging event in the life of God's servant, the Apostle Peter?

## Declining Steps

*First*, we should observe that Peter's great fall was preceded by gradually declining steps. His great sin was preceded by lesser evils. The steps of his demise are clearly identified by the inspired historians, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

First, Peter displayed terrible pride and self-confidence. Though all the other disciples might deny the Savior, Peter boasted that he would never do so. He openly boasted that he was ready to go with the Lord Jesus both to prison and to death. Then, when the Lord Jesus told him to watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation, Peter was found sleeping. Third, Peter was vacillating and indecisive. When Judas, the chief priests, and soldiers came to arrest the Son of God, Peter immediately fought for his Master bravely. Then, he ran away. Then, he returned. Then, we see him following the Savior; but "*Peter followed afar off.*" Next we see this man, who was the object of God's everlasting love and boundless, immutable grace, mingling with his Savior's enemies. He went into the high priest's house and sat down among his servants, warming himself by their fire, hoping to hide himself among them, hoping that he would not be identified as one of the Lord's disciples by his enemies. There he sat, among godless, reprobate men, committing the most wicked deeds ever performed by men, hearing the filth gushing from their hearts, as they cast accusation after accusation against the Lord of glory, and he wanted to be identified not as a follower of Christ, but as one of them! Finally, Peter was overwhelmed with fear and denied the Lord Jesus three times.

Let us ever beware of the little foxes that spoil the vine (Song

of Solomon 2:15). What a sweet and tender precept this is! How very needful! Foxes are here used to represent the subtle, less open, less known sins and corruptions lurking in us, like those cunning creatures, hide in silence, waiting to catch their prey.

Foxes are also representative of cunning, false prophets hiding themselves among God's saints (Lamentations 5:18; Ezekiel 13:4). Satan never more cunningly and, perhaps, never more effectually deceives men, than when he transforms himself into an angel of light and makes his ministers ministers of righteousness.

The vines the foxes would destroy are the Lord's people, believers, having tender grapes. What is more tender than a tender conscience? What can be more easily wounded? Let us ever look to Christ, the Lord of the vineyard, for grace to be on the look out against these destructive enemies to our souls' welfare. Let us ever be keenly aware of the fact that our greatest watchfulness and most fervent prayers, without His watchful eye and gracious protection, can never protect us from these shrewd, cunning foxes. Let us never cease to ask our Savior to protect us from these foxes and destroy them before us.

"Lord, I would say, keep me from every enemy which doth evil in thy sanctuary, and preserve alive, in flourishing circumstances, all those tender graces of thy Spirit bestowed upon me, that I may bring forth fruit to the praise of thy holy name, and may flourish and spread abroad as the cedar in Lebanon." (*Robert Hawker*)

And let us never cease to give thanks for the sweet assurance that though the foxes would destroy the vine, if they could, they never shall, because the Lord Jesus Himself keeps His vine!

## Inward Corruption

Here is another thing we all prefer not to think about, but something we should constantly remember. — None of us know what vile corruptions are hidden deep in our hearts and what horrible deeds we might commit in a moment, if the Lord did not

keep us from acting according to what we are. Like you and me, Peter knew he was a sinner. He confessed it. — “*Lord, depart from me. I am a sinful man.*” But like us, Peter had no idea how sinful he was. I am sure he never dreamed he could do the things he did in the high priest’s house that night.

You and I need to be constantly aware of this fact. — There is no evil in the world that is not in us. And there is no evil thing we will not do in a heartbeat, if the Lord God leaves us to ourselves. Peter was a great man, a great Apostle, a great believer. He was faithful and courageous, a man who truly loved and trusted the Son of God; but he was just a man, a sinner saved by grace, nothing more.

Whether we know it or not, we carry within us a boundless capacity for evil. There is no enormity of sin into which we will not run, if we are not held from the evil that is in us by the hand of God’s omnipotent grace. When we read the falls of Noah, Lot, and Peter, we only read what would befall ourselves, if the Lord did not prevent it. Let us never presume. Let us never indulge in high thoughts about our own strength, or look down upon others who have fallen. May God the Holy Spirit graciously and constantly teach us to “*walk humbly with God.*”

## No Effectual Means

*Third*, the story of Peter’s fall teaches us that no means of grace will effectually serve our souls, unless the means is made effectual by God’s Spirit. I would say nothing to minimize the use of outward means. God uses outward means. But the means are meaningless, without the blessing of God upon them and the work of His Spirit by them.

Not only is that true, but it is equally important for us to understand that no past experience will secure our souls from present evil. Peter was an apostle of Christ; yet, he fell. Peter had seen and performed great miracles; yet, he fell. Peter once walked on water to the Savior; yet, he fell. Peter had seen the transfigured Christ; yet, he fell. Peter had just heard the greatest sermon ever preached (John 14-16); yet, he fell. Peter had been

warned by the Master; yet, he fell. Peter heard the cock crow, reminding him of the Savior's warning; yet, he fell, persisting in his downward course.

Amid all these distinguishing mercies, and forewarned as he was by Christ, he not only denied Christ, but persisted in the denial, though the first crowing of the cock told him of his treachery. Still, he went on in his wickedness, fully aware of what he was doing! How often we hear the Word of God, or read it, hearing the very voice of God, as Peter did when he heard the crowing of the cock in the early hour of the morning, and totally ignore His voice. We will never heed it, except the Lord graciously causes us to hear it, as he caused Peter to hear the second crowing of the cock.

Peter was in the immediate presence of his Savior; yet, he fell! No means of grace is a means of grace, without the workings of God's grace upon us and in us. The only thing that distinguishes us from others is the distinguishing grace of our God. The only righteousness we have is Christ; and the only thing that keeps us is the grace of God.

The difference between Judas' sin, which was for him sin unto death, and Peter's sin was not their deeds, or the extent of their guilt, or the aggravating circumstances of their crimes, or even that one sinned against greater light or more persistently than the other. The only difference between Judas's fall and Peter's was this. The Lord Jesus prayed for Peter, that his faith fail not, but not for Judas. Christ redeemed Peter with His precious blood, but not Judas. God loved and chose Peter, but not Judas. The only difference between these two men was the difference made by God's distinguishing grace. Let us never forget that fact (1 Corinthians 4:7).

## **Peter's Recovery**

What should we learn from Peter's recovery? For one thing, we should learn that when we fall, we have no ability to recover ourselves. When Peter heard the rooster crow the first time, how alarmed he must have been. Yet, he went on to even greater

wickedness. Even when he heard the second crowing, he was unaffected, until *“the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.”*

What a look that must have been! The Lord turned to Peter. Peter did not turn to the Lord. He looked upon Peter, not in anger and disgust, but in mercy, love, and grace. That look was a look of tenderness, compassion, and faithfulness. With that look, the Lord Jesus spoke silently, but effectually to the heart of His fallen disciple. He seems to have said, *“I have loved thee with an everlasting love.”*...*“Ye have not chosen me; but I have chosen you.”*...*“I give unto you eternal life; and you shall never perish.”*...*“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”*...*“I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions.”*...*“Fear not, for I have redeemed thee.”*...*“In me is thy righteousness found.”*...*“I am thy strength.”*...*“I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”*...*“Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.”*...*“Return unto me, return unto me; and I will pardon.”*...*“Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself.”*

## Our Great Savior

What a great, gloriously, indescribably great Savior our dear Lord Jesus is! His love for us is great. His grace to us is great. His faithfulness is great. His forgiveness is great. His righteousness is great. His atonement is great. His keeping is great. And His restoration is great. — Peter had gone back to his nets and boats, sure that he was reprobate; but the Lord Jesus would not let him go (Mark 16:7; John 21:15-17).

# Chapter 132

## Majesty on Trial

Luke 22:63-71

“And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote [him]. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him. And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe: And if I also ask [you], ye will not answer me, nor let [me] go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth” (Luke 22:63-71).

While our Lord Jesus was before Caiaphas in the dead of night, before the Sanhedrim had been fully gathered together to hold their trial at daybreak, our dear Redeemer was treated with the utmost cruelty and abuse. His enemies were so anxious to condemn Him that as soon as He was brought into the high priest’s house, they began tormenting Him, as they blasphemed. Then, early in the morning, the Jewish Sanhedrim gathered to condemn the Lord of Glory. That is what is described in this portion of Holy Scripture.

Like wild beast, or enraged savages, “*The men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him.*” They vented their utmost hatred

upon the “*man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.*” His tormentors had no pity for Him in their hard, calloused hearts. None were found to vindicate His character, or plead His cause. No man stood with Him. There were none to pity Him.

What gross cowards these men were! Cruelty is always the badge of cowardice. They were the very same men who in the garden, “*went backward, and fell to the ground,*” when our Lord said, “*I AM.*” They went out, with swords and staves, to take Him prisoner. Yet, they fell to the ground when He simply spoke a single word to them. But now they think they have Him in their power. He stands before them as a sheep before her shearers; and they are determined to be as cruel as possible in tormenting Him.

Yet, even this record of their cruelty is set before us in the Word of God that we, through patience and consolation of the Scriptures, might have hope. Blessed Holy Spirit, whose Word we have read, be our Teacher and show us wondrous things out of Your law this hour, for Christ’s sake.

## God in Great Humiliation

First, we have before us a vivid picture of that which the Apostle wrote concerning God our Savior, when he said, “*He humbled himself!*” Here is God, the eternal God of Glory, in great, indescribable humiliation.

“And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote *him*. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him” (vv. 63-65).

There stands Jesus of Nazareth, God in human flesh, the God-man our Mediator. I will not attempt to picture Him. No artist’s brush can paint the picture. No mortal tongue can describe it. But, here God the Holy Spirit paints a picture of our Savior’s humiliation with words of infinite skill, in the eloquence of simplicity, without the slightest hint of overstatement.

May God the Holy Spirit give us eyes to see Him who was

tormented in the high priest's house on that dark, dark night. Do you see Him standing before His implacable foes, clothed with a seamless garment, bound, delivered over to the officers, and now surrounded by them, as they mock Him, scoff at Him, and beat Him? Let your eye rest on Him. Set your heart on Him. There He stands, our Savior, very God of very God. What do you see?

I see Omnipotence held captive. The Spirit of God speaks of "*the men that held Jesus.*" Is God held prisoner by men? Yes, He was. The man they held is Himself "*over all God, blessed forever,*" the Creator of heaven and earth. "*All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.*" He was, at that very moment "*upholding all things by the word of his power.*" In all His weakness and in all His sufferings, He was still "*over all, God blessed forever.*"

Though mocked, beaten of men, and blasphemed, the holy angels adore Him. Surely, there is something wondrous in this! Omnipotence held captive! He who can create or destroy, according to the good pleasure of His own will, took upon Himself our nature, and in that nature sank so low as to become subject even to the very utmost cruelty of man. What a wondrous stoop of condescension! The omnipotent God allows Himself to be bound, and never proves Himself more truly omnipotent than when He permits Himself to be held as a prisoner by sinful men.

Our omnipotent God became the captive prisoner of wicked men, that wicked men held in the captivity of their own sin and guilt might be set free. The Lord Jesus Christ went into captivity that he might lead captivity captive and set us free.

Behold the Man again. This man is the glory of God. Looking steadfastly on Him, I see glory mocked, for "*the men that held Jesus mocked him.*" They could not see His glory, because they were blind, and because He veiled His glory, hiding it from them. But the angels of God beheld it. And because He has revealed it to us and given us eyes to see, we behold His glory, "*the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*"

It is amazing to me that the God who reigns in glory over myriads of holy angels should be mocked by miscreants, who

could not even have lived for a second in His presence if He had not given them life and sustained them in it. Yet, there He is; He who made the heavens and the earth, despised and rejected of men, treated with the utmost scorn and mockery.

His glory was mocked that we might be glorified together with Him, — we who have so horribly mocked His glory! What is sin, but the mockery of the glory of God? What is sin, but the attempt of man to rape God and rob him of His glory? While I am indignant with those men who so mocked my Savior, I am even more indignant with myself for all the mockery I have heaped upon His glory! Oh, how I have mocked him!

Behold the man again. Looking upon my Savior as He stands silently before His tormentors, I see goodness smitten, perfect, infinite, unutterable goodness stricken, bruised, assailed, assaulted, and smitten. — *“The men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him.”* To smite wickedness is an act of justice; but to smite goodness is an abomination (Proverbs 17:15). The blessed Son of God who stood there had within His soul that mercy which endures forever. Yet, they smote Him. There burned in His holy heart a love which many waters cannot quench, and which the floods of waters cannot drown. Yet, they smote Him! He had come to bring peace and goodwill to men, and to set up a kingdom of joy and love, of righteousness and peace. Yet, they smote Him!

Never was goodness so good as when our blessed Savior, the good and the just was smitten, not of men, but of God, that all the goodness of God might be ours in him (Proverbs 17:15; 1 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Oh what great goodness there is here! — He was *“smitten of God and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him. And with his stripes we are healed!”* Yet, again my heart is compelled to cry, — How very grievously have I smitten Him, even in His own house!

I see something else here. I see omniscience blindfolded. — *“When they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?”* Of course, omniscience can never be blinded. Yet, there is God in

human flesh blindfolded. Why did our Savior endure this indignation? What is the meaning of this? Why is it written here? I do not presume to think I know the answer to such questions fully. Yet, when I see omniscience blindfolded, and hear these men ask the God of Glory who smote Him, Numbers 23:21 immediately comes to my mind. By the sufferings and death of Christ, the God of Glory has been, in absolute justice, forever blinded to our sins, so blinded that He does not even see us as the sinners who have smitten Him! Blessed be His name forever, "*He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.*" The precious blood of Christ has so thoroughly blotted out our sins that God does not behold iniquity in Israel!

## Indescribable Depravity

Next, look at our Savior's tormentors. In the actions of these men, I see a terrible, but clear portrayal of the indescribable depravity of humanity, the indescribable depravity of your heart and mine.

There is much talk these days about the will of man. Some fools (I am using the word "some" most graciously.) even talk about man's "free will." Here are men, religious men, the temple guards, acting in the dark of night, acting not by order, not by law, not by the influence of others, but acting by the impulse of their own will. The things they did to the Son of God draw an ugly, but unmistakably clear picture of the nature of man and the nature of his will. They have God Himself in their hands. What will man do in his time of utmost liberty and freedom? — "*And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him*" (vv. 64-65). Oh, what enmity fallen man has for God! How utterly depraved we are! Fallen man hates God. Ours is a race of rebels who defy God's justice. We defy His omniscience. We are a people whose lives are lives full of blasphemies and insults to the Almighty.

Fallen man is more relentlessly cruel than any wild beast.

## Majesty in Misery

Yet, I see something else here. I see majesty in my Savior's misery. Amid all this evil there stands God our Savior, glorious in majesty, wonderful in goodness, majestic in glory. As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, He opens not His mouth. No flush of anger appears on His face. No glare of wrath shoots from His eyes. He bore it all, bore it in His very soul, with Divine patience, the very patience of "*the God of patience.*" He bore all in patience, knowing that He bore these things from men by the will and hand of His heavenly Father. — "*Never man spake like this Man,*" when he spoke not a word! What an example he sets for us to follow.

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Peter 2:21-24)

Our Savior was triumphant in submission. Submitting to the will of His Father, His persecutors could not make Him give way to anger. They could not destroy His devotion. They could not force Him to think of Himself. They could not keep Him from doing all that He came to do for us. No, the strong-souled Christ persevered in His merciful work until He had accomplished our redemption by the Sacrifice of Himself.

## Obstinate Unbelief

"And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led

him into their council, saying, Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe: And if I also ask *you*, ye will not answer me, nor let *me* go” (vv. 66-68).

They were determined not to believe in Him and receive Him. Their unbelief was willful and obstinate. They defied that which was clearly and indisputably set before them. Therefore, our Savior said, “*Ye will not believe.*”

This is the great evil that lies at the root of most men’s sins, they believe not in Jesus Christ, whom God hath sent. It is this of which the Spirit of God convinces men, as our Savior foretold concerning him: “*He will convince the world of sin...because they believe not on me.*” Yet, there is nothing more reasonable, nothing more worthy to be believed than the revelation God has given of His Son to us in the Holy Scriptures.

## Christ my God

Behold the man again. I see Christ my God confidently declaring His everlasting glory as our Savior.

“Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth” (vv. 69-71).

Our Savior plainly asserted that Daniel’s vision (Daniel 7:13-14) would be fulfilled in Him, thus asserting that He is God our Savior, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. These religious rebels heard the word out of our Savior’s own mouth. Yet, they would not believe. What a glaring proof these men are that faith is the gift of God.

## Love in Labor

Behold the Man one more time. Here I see love in labor. All this

shame and suffering was endured by our Savior because of His great love for us, because of the joy that was set before Him, the prospect of giving us eternal life and salvation. — *“He loved me, and gave himself for me.”*

Let every believing sinner take this personally. For you, as much as if there were no other person in the whole universe, for you, the King of glory became the King of scorn, and bore all this shame and misery. — For you, as your Substitute, He bore it all, and indescribably more, when He was made sin for you. He shed His blood, laid down His life, bore all the wrath of God, sacrificed Himself and made atonement for you, for your sin! — For me! For my sin!

*“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”*  
— What does that mean? It means that the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ shall never be discovered a miscarriage. Every sinner for whom He died shall be saved. His soul’s travail shall not be in vain! Yet, it means more. It means that when He has brought His ransomed home to glory, He shall be satisfied with you. He shall be satisfied with me. And we shall be satisfied with Him forever!

# Chapter 133

## “Then said Jesus...”

### Luke 23:1-46

“And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this [fellow] perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest [it]...But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children...And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots... And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost” (Luke 23:1-46).

How I pray that the Lord God will be pleased to grant me grace that I may live with the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ever before my mind, with the scenes of my Savior’s redemptive work and glory constantly upon my heart, and the redemption He

accomplished for me by His substitutionary death ever flooding my ransomed soul. Let's go again to Mt. Calvary, asking God the Holy Spirit to inscribe the things we see here upon our hearts for the glory of His own great name, for Christ's sake. — What a scene of infamy we have before us! — What a scene of grace! — What a scene of the revelation of the glory of God!

## Our Lord's Humiliation

The Lord Jesus was hurriedly brought before Pilate, where the Jews slanderously accused Him. But Pilate saw their accusations for what they were, nothing but the rantings of envious religionists. Once he found out the Lord Jesus was a Galilean, he tried to rid himself of the matter and sent Him to Herod.

When Herod could not persuade the Son of God to dance before him, he mocked Him shamefully and sent Him back to Pilate. And that day, those two political jackals became friends. And Pilate, willing to please the Jews, "*delivered Jesus to their will*" to be crucified. Pilate, Herod, the high priest, the Jewish mob, and the soldiers were but contemptible little imps, unworthy of further mention. There is but one thing worthy of notice in these verses, one thing they were written to reveal and that is the greatness of our Lord's humiliation for us.

What base contempt and mockery our God and Savior endured in the house of the high priest, and at the palaces of Pilate and Herod! Truly, "*He humbled himself!*" He emptied Himself of all the dignity and honor that rightly belongs to Him, that He might redeem and save sinners who deserve to be forever mocked in the fires of hell and held in contempt by Him. — "*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich*" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

## Depravity and Substitution

In verses 13-25 the Spirit of God gives us a terrible, graphic

display of the utter depravity of our race and the vile hatred of the human heart for the God of Glory! What base, self-serving weaklings men in powerful positions often are! — Pilate and Herod cared for nothing but themselves. Both, though men of almost absolute power in their realms, cowered before the people they ruled, just to gain a moment of approval from them. The whole crowd, religious and reprobate, Jewish and pagan, craved to murder the incarnate God. And Pilate “*delivered Jesus to their will.*” — What an indictment this is against the will of man!

Yet, there is something glorious here. We read in verse 17 — “*For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.*” By the arrangement of Divine providence, there was a custom and a man in the scene before us who gave opportunity for our Lord to display everything He had come to accomplish. When Barabbas was released and the Lord Jesus died in his place, it is as though the Savior had said, “See this! This is why I came to this hour, to die the Just for the unjust in the place of guilty sinners as their Substitute that they might go free!”

## Weep Not

Luke is the only Gospel writer who recorded the things written in verses 26-31.

“And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear *it* after Jesus. And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed *are* the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”

It is not surprising to see these women weeping. It is shocking

that those few women were the only ones who wept, as they beheld the Lamb of God surrounded by hell-hounds craving His blood. Yet, when the Savior saw their tears and heard their cries, He said, "*Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.*" He desired no pity. He was not a helpless sufferer, but Jehovah's voluntary Servant, now performing His final deed of obedience. Yet, He looked upon the nation that was about to murder Him with tender pity, as He anticipated the judgment that nation was heaping upon itself.

### Three Malefactors

"And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left" (vv. 32-33)

It is not by accident that Luke wrote, "*And there were also two other malefactors (two other violators of the law), led with Him to be put to death.*" The obvious indication is that our blessed Redeemer was one of three malefactors. — "*He was reckoned among the transgressors*" (Luke 22:37). — "*He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many*" (Isaiah 53:12). — "*And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And He was numbered with the transgressors*" (Matthew 15:28). Being our Surety and Representative, He stood before the offended law and justice of God as the greatest of all malefactors!

"Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath

made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

## Seven Statements

As He hung upon the cursed tree, bearing our sin, suffering all the horrible fury of the wrath of God for us, when He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, the Lord Jesus made seven distinct statements which should ever be held in fond memory in our hearts.

There have been mountains of words and thousands of sermons preached from these seven sayings of Christ from the cross. I cannot add anything to what has already been spoken and written by faithful men. But I do hope that God the Holy Spirit will enable me to give you a glimpse of what I see in them. These are the very words spoken by our great God and Savior in His humiliation, spoken as He engaged the forces of hell and endured the indescribable wrath of God in the place of sinners. In these seven words from the cross I see the glorious Person, work, and offices of our Lord Jesus Christ beautifully demonstrated.

## A Word of Forgiveness

The first of those seven statements is found in Luke 23:34. — *“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.”* Here I see Christ our Mediator, our High Priest and Advocate pleading for the forgiveness of guilty sinners. Here is the Son of God suffering by the hands of wicked men, suffering with wicked men, suffering as a wicked man, and yet praying for the men who made Him suffer. — *“There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men,”* and that Mediator is *“the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Timothy 2:5).

We must have a Mediator (Hebrews 5:1). The Mediator must be a man of God’s choosing (Hebrews 5:4-5). The Mediator must

pray and be heard (Hebrews 5:7). He must have a sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice was Himself, His own life, His blood, His body and His soul! The sacrifice must be offered upon the altar of God. The Altar upon which our Savior sacrificed Himself was the Altar of His own Divinity. And the Mediator must have a blessing to bestow. That blessing is God's salvation (Numbers 6:24-26). None but the Lord Jesus Christ meets the qualifications of a mediator between God and men (John 14:6; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2).

### A Word of Assurance

The *second* word is found in Luke 23:43. The dying thief cried, "*Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom!*" — "*And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.*" Here is a word of salvation and assurance spoken to a believing sinner by Christ our Savior and King.

Even as He hung upon the cross, suffering untold agony under the wrath of God, Jesus Christ reigned as Lord and King over everything. Do not ever imagine that our Lord Jesus was in anyway the helpless victim of circumstances when He died at Calvary. Even in His death, He was the God of all circumstances and all events. Here is the sovereign King, the Ruler of the Kingdom of God, saving whom He will (Rom. 9:15). Here is the King of Grace opening the door which no mere man can ever open. Here is the Prince of Peace giving peace that no man can give. Here is the King of Glory promising mercy and eternal life that no man can merit. "*Salvation is of the LORD!*" Grace comes from the throne of grace; and the King who sits upon that throne is the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:22; John 5:20-21; 17:2).

### A Word of Tender Care

The *third* word spoken by our Lord as He hung upon the cross is found in John 19:26-27. Here I hear Christ, our Representative and Example, speaking a word of tender care.

“When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.”

Even in the agonies of death, under the penalty of sin, enduring the wrath of God, fulfilling the everlasting covenant, accomplishing eternal redemption for us, and satisfying the Divine justice, our Lord Jesus Christ did not neglect the responsibilities of manhood. Our Savior, as our Representative and Example, deliberately gave attention to His responsibilities as a man, even in the time of His dying agony.

Our blessed Savior fulfilled all righteousness for us, both as our Representative and as our Example. He did everything that it is right for a man to do. He was circumcised. He was subject unto his parents. He was baptized. He attended the synagogue. Our Lord Jesus was “*made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.*” And in His dying hour, our Redeemer tenderly cared for His mother.

He fulfilled all righteousness as our legal Representative (Romans 5:19; and He fulfilled all righteousness as our Example of Righteousness (John 13:13-15; 1 Peter 2:21-24). If we would learn how to live in this world for the glory of God, if we would learn how to serve our generation, if we would learn how to worship God, we must go to Calvary. There we behold the Lamb of God and learn how to be a man. There we learn what submission to the will of God involves. At Calvary we see patience in suffering, learn how to love our brethren, how to love our wives (Ephesians 5:25-27), and how to give (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Yet, there is more here than our Lord’s care for His mother. When our Savior said to Mary, “*Woman, behold thy Son,*” I cannot help thinking that He was saying, “Behold Me now, and remember what I told you when I was just a boy, ‘*I must be about My Father’s business.*’ Behold Me now, and remember the song you sang when I was still in your womb” (Luke 1:46-55).

## A Word of Agony

The *fourth* word is found in Matthew 27:46. — “*And about the ninth hour (at 3:00 in the afternoon, after three hours of great darkness) Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*”

Here I see Christ our Substitute crying out in agony of soul. This is the only time recorded in Scripture that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to the Father as God. Here he takes the lowest place of humanity and cries out to His Father and our Father as a creature to be pitied by His Creator. In His great agony, this mighty Man who is God reverts to His childhood, speaking in His native Syrian tongue, not in the Hebrew of His fathers or in the Greek He acquired as He matured.

At the height of His obedience to the Father, the Lord of Glory was forsaken by His Father, because we deserved to be forever forsaken of that God whom we have spent our lives forsaking. He was forsaken of God, because He was made sin for us. Reproach now broke His heart.

“*My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?*” This is a cry arising from depths of infinite anguish no human being can know. This cry no mortal mind can comprehend. This mystery no creature can fathom. Martin Luther, after studying and meditating upon this text for hours, closed his Bible, slammed his fists down on his desk and cried, “God forsaken of God! My God, no man can understand that!”

I will not attempt to explain what no man can understand. But, with a happy broken heart, I rejoice in the fact of this our Substitute’s greatest sorrow. He was forsaken of God. That means those sinners for whom He died shall never be forsaken of God (Isaiah 53:9-11; John 3:14-16; Romans 5:6-8; 8:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21; 1 Peter 2:24-25; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 4:9-10).

What an infinitely, horribly evil thing sin must be! How holy, just, righteous, and good our God must be! O my soul, how great,

how infinitely great is the love of God for His people! How anxious, willing, and ready the holy Lord God is to save poor sinners! – “*He delighteth in mercy!*”

## A Word of Great Need

Our Lord’s fifth word from the cross is found in John 19:28. — “*After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.*” Here is Christ the Man expressing His great need and desire. Here we see our Savior’s real humanity. This is the shortest of the seven statements He made on the cross; but it is every bit as instructive as the other six. I am sure it is meant to show us at least these three things about our Savior.

1. *His Body’s Thirst* — Being in anguish of body, burning with fever, His tongue swollen and cleaving to His jaws, He thirsted for water, just like the rich man in hell, as He endured the fire of God’s hot, holy wrath for us.

2. *His Soul’s Thirst* — Being forsaken of God, He thirsted in His soul. – “*As the hart planteth after the water brooks,*” so panted His soul for God (Psalms 22:1-21; 40:11-13; 69:1-20).

3. *His Heart’s Thirst* — The Lord of Glory was made sin, made to endure all the horror of God’s holy, unmitigated wrath, because He thirsted for the souls of men. He thirsted for His people. He thirsted to be thirsted after. When I hear the Master cry, “*I thirst,*” I can almost hear His heart crying, “*I will that they also whom thou hast given Me be with me where I am, that they may behold My glory.*”

## A Word of Accomplishment

“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now

accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put [it] upon hyssop, and put [it] to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” (John 19:28-30)

*“It is finished!”* — What a blessed, triumphant word! Our blessed Savior was not crying a sigh of relief. He was not saying, “At last, it is over.” Most men leave this world with things unfinished. So many plans unfinished! So many hopes unfulfilled! So many desires unsatisfied! So many works incomplete! So many things they wanted to do, or see, or experience, unfinished! Not so with the Lord Jesus Christ, our great Surety! He accomplished everything He came here to do.

What did he come here to do? – Did He come here to do the Father’s will (Hebrews 10)? *“It is finished!”* — Did He come here to save His people (Matthew 1:21)? *“It is finished!”* — Did He come here to fulfill all the types, promises, and prophecies of the Scriptures? *“It is finished!”* — Did He come here to make an end of sin? Did He come here to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself? *“It is finished!”* — Did He come here to bring in everlasting righteousness? *“It is finished!”* — Did He come here to obtain eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12)? *“It is finished!”* — Did He come here to redeem us from the curse of the law? *“It is finished!”* — Did He come here to fulfill and make an end of the law? Did He come here to magnify the law and make it honorable? *“It is finished!”*

This is the Surety’s cry of accomplished suretyship to the Father. — *“It is finished!”* — *“I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do!”* Here our Covenant Surety says to His Father, I have finished all the work trusted to My hands. I have redeemed all the souls trusted to Me. I have ransomed all the sheep. I have found all the lost ones I came to find. All the work is fully done, well done, perfectly done!

This is the cry of our great Surety to poor, needy sinners! — *“It is finished!”* — Wrath is finished! — Judgment is finished! — Sin is finished! — Righteousness is finished! — Redemption

is finished! — Justification is finished! — Sanctification is finished! — Salvation is finished!

*“It is finished!”* Sinners, hear it:  
Hear the dying Savior’s cry;  
*“It is finished!”* Angels Sing it,  
Sing the praise of Christ on high.  
*“It is finished!”* — *“It is finished!”*  
Tell it through the earth and sky!

Justice now demands salvation  
For those souls whose wrath Christ bore;  
And it smiles with approbation  
On the ransomed evermore!  
Grace and mercy, grace and mercy  
Freely flow from boundless stores.

Hear the Son of God declare it,  
All is done He came to do!  
Needy sinners, Hear, believe it. —  
Is not this good news to you? —  
*“It is finished!”* *“It is finished!”*  
All is done! Oh, yes, it’s true!

*“It is finished!”* All is over.  
Jesus drank damnation dry!  
Never can a ransomed sinner  
God’s salvation be denied!  
*“It is finished!”* *“It is finished!”*  
Cries our Sur’ty now on High!

Who is he that shall condemn us?  
Who shall charge us now with sin?  
It is God who justified us,  
Christ Who died, cries in our name, —  
*“It is finished!”* *“It is finished!”*  
Praised forever be His name!

## A Word of Rest

The Savior's last word from the cross is found in Luke 23:46 — "*And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost.*" Our Savior died with the Word of God in his heart and on his lips (Psalm 31:1-5). Here I see Christ our Sabbath entering into rest. Once our great Redeemer had finished His work, He "*cried with a loud voice, and said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost.*" Thus He entered into His rest and obtained eternal rest for us (Hebrews 4:9-11).

Notice here, our Savior who had cried, "*My God, My God, Why hast Thou forsaken Me?*" now calls His Father by that endearing name, "Father." The storm of God's holy wrath beat fiercely upon His holy soul; but now the storm is nearly over. Only one thing is to be done. He must yet die; but here He seems to say to poor, needy sinners, "Look here. Look unto Me. Behold, now reconciliation is made. Anger is turned away. Judgment is gone!" (Read Isaiah 12:1-6.)

Our blessed Savior committed His spirit into His Father's hands, not Satan's. Some vainly imagine that the Lord Jesus was now taken to hell to be tormented of the devil for three days. That is not so (Hebrews 9:12). He owed Satan nothing. Here He conquered the fiend of hell forever. He committed His spirit into His Father's hands, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:22-24).

At last, in sovereign majesty, "*He gave up the ghost.*" He dismissed His spirit. This Man who is God our Savior did what none but God, who gives life and takes life at His will, could do. "*He gave up the ghost.*" That is to say, He dismissed His spirit that we might come now to Him and enter into His rest (Matthew 11:28-30).

# Chapter 134

## Barabbas – A Picture of Substitution

### Luke 23:1-33

“And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate...(For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this [man], and release unto us Barabbas...And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will...And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left” (Luke 23:1-33).

Of all the doctrines taught in the Word of God, none is so vitally important as the doctrine of substitution. Men everywhere talk about the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. They speak much about Christ, the sinner’s Substitute. But their language is vague. And very few people understand what the Bible teaches about substitution. In the historic narrative given in Luke 23:1-33 we have a clear illustration of the nature of Christ’s death. It was a substitutionary sacrifice and atonement. The innocent died in the place of the guilty; and the guilty must go free.

### Background

You are all familiar with the story of Barabbas. It is recorded by

all four of the Gospel writers. During the days of Israel's subjection to Rome, a strange custom was regularly practiced. On the day of the Passover the Roman governor released a guilty prisoner. No doubt, this was intended to be an act of benevolence on the part of the Roman authorities toward the Jews. The Jews probably accepted it as a significant compliment to their Passover celebrations. Since on that day the Jews were themselves delivered out of the land of Egypt, they may have thought it a most fitting thing for some prisoner to obtain his freedom.

Since some prisoner must, by the arrangement of Divine providence, be released on the Day of Atonement, Pilate thought that he now had opportunity to allow the Savior to go free, without compromising himself in the eyes of his superiors at Rome. So he asked the people which of the two they preferred, a notorious criminal or the holy Savior. Without hesitation or dissension, the crowd cried for the release of Barabbas and the death of Christ. Pilate's last effort to release Christ had failed. — *“And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will”* (vv. 24-25).

Who Barabbas was we do not know. His name signifies “His father's son.” Some suggest that there is an indication here that he was particularly and specially the son of Satan. Others suppose Barabbas was an endearing name, a name given to him because he was his father's darling, a child indulged by his father, or as we would say “his daddy's boy.” Certainly, there is a warning here for us. — Overly indulged, spoiled children are the most likely persons to become injurious to society, griefs to their parents, and curses to all around them. Looking at the cases of Eli's two sons, Absalom, and Barabbas, we are warned as parents not to be excessive in the indulgence and pampering of our children.

## Substitution

At any rate, Barabbas appears to have committed at least three

crimes. He was imprisoned for robbery, sedition, and murder. We might well pity the father of such a son. This wretch was brought out and set in competition with the holy Son of God; and the poor inhabitants of Jerusalem were so hardened in their unbelief and sin, so thirsty for the innocent blood of Christ, that they preferred this obnoxious creature to the man who is God's own Fellow!

This fact is very significant. There is more teaching in it than we might realize at first glance. In this act of freeing the guilty and binding the innocent, we have a vivid example of salvation by substitution. The guilty is set free and the innocent is put to death in his place. Barabbas is spared, and Christ is crucified. We have in this striking event a display of the manner in which God pardons and justifies the ungodly. He does it because Christ has suffered and died in their stead, the Just for the unjust.

We deserve to die for the punishment of our sins; but a mighty Substitute has suffered our punishment. Eternal death is our due; but a glorious Surety has died for us. We are all in the position of Barabbas by nature. We are guilty, wicked, condemned, and shut up under the law. But when we were without hope and without strength, "*in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*" And now God, for Christ's sake, can be just and yet "*the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*"

## Two Birds

In the Old Testament rite of cleansing lepers, two birds were used. One bird was killed, and its blood was poured into a basin. The other bird was dipped into the blood, and then, with its wings covered with crimson, it was set free to fly into the open air. The slain bird typified our Savior whose blood was shed at Mt. Calvary. And every soul that by faith is plunged into the...

"Fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,

is set free, owing his life and liberty to the Savior who was once for sinners slain. That is substitution. It comes to this: Barabbas must die, or Christ must die. You the sinner must perish, or

Christ, the immaculate Lamb of God, must be slain. Behold, the Incarnate God dies that we may be delivered. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered in the place of sinners like Barabbas, satisfying the wrath and justice of God; and, like Barabbas, all those sinners for whom Christ made satisfaction must go free. I want you to see four things about this man Barabbas.

## *A Guilty Man*

The first thing I want you to see is the fact that Barabbas was a man guilty of many offenses. We sometimes say that a man is “as guilty as sin.” Barabbas was as guilty as sin. His life was a life of riotousness and sin. He was tried in a court of law and found guilty of robbery, sedition, and murder. As such he is a fair representative of all men by nature. We could all be named “Barabbas.” We are all the sons of our father Adam. His image, his nature, and his character are reflected in us all.

Like Barabbas, we are all rebels. Barabbas stirred up sedition. He was a revolutionary. That is a modern name for rebels. He would not submit to authority. This is the problem with our race. We are proud, self-willed rebels. We hate authority.

In our father Adam, we rebelled against God’s command. We are born with a rebellious nature. In pride and self-will, we rebelled all the days of our lives against God’s throne. We sinfully rebel against God’s holy law. Man acts like he does simply because God says, “Don’t do that.” Man sees the good and refuses to do it simply because God says, “Do it.” And we are steadfast and persistent in our rebellion.

As children, we rebelled against parents and teachers. As adults, we rebel against moral and civil authority. Even as believers, we have a nature within us that rebels against everything holy and good (Romans 7:14, 15, 18).

And like Barabbas, we are all robbers. It was Adam’s determination to rob God of His authority, of His creation, and of His glory. And that is what man does by his sin. We have robbed God of His glory, refusing to worship Him. We have robbed God

of His honor, refusing to believe His Word. We have robbed God of His creation, stealing that which God has made for Himself and using it for ourselves, without regard to Him. We have robbed ourselves and our children of the blessedness of our original creation, fellowship with God, the image of God, true freedom, the favor of God, and of life itself. Through our sin and rebellion our race is reduced to nothing but emptiness and vanity. Once we were princes of God's creation. Now we are empty handed thieves (Ephesians 2:11-12).

Yet, there is more. Like Barabbas, we are all murderers. In the course of his rebellion and robbery, Barabbas had committed murder. So have we all. There is not a guiltless one among us. We have all committed multiple murders in our hearts. Envy, hatred, anger, wrath, and malice are in the eyes of God's law equal to murder (Matthew 5:21-22). We have infected our children with the deadly disease of sin. Sin is a plague of the heart. It is a family disease passed on from generation to generation. What is more, we are all guilty of the blood of the Son of God. Yes, we are guilty of slaughtering the Lord of Glory!

We must never forget what we are by nature. There is no evil deed, or atrocious crime, or an infamous sin recorded on the pages of human history which does not reside in the heart of every man, woman, and child in the world (Matthew 15:19). We all might be most properly named "Barabbas"! We are all the descendants of Adam. We are all of our father the devil. We are all, by nature, "*children of wrath, even as others.*"

## A Condemned Prisoner

In the second place, Barabbas was a prisoner under the sentence of the law. Barabbas had been found guilty. The sentence was passed. He must die. On the day when the Jews observe their Passover, two thieves will be crucified. And Barabbas will be crucified in the midst of them, for he is the vilest of the three. Take him away. Bind him hand and foot in the prison until the day of his execution.

Picture Barabbas in the prison. He expected very soon to be

taken out, nailed to a cross and hung up to die, as the just payment for his crimes. He was held under the sentence of the law. That is just the condition of every person in the world by nature (John 3:36; Romans 3:19; Galatians 3:10, 22-23; Ephesians 2:3).

Man's bondage is as cruel and terrible as it is sure. Men today like to boast of their independence and freedom. People think, "I'm going to do my own thing." But they are only doing exactly the same thing that men have been doing throughout history. Man is not free. He is in bondage. He is in bondage to religious tradition, social custom, and peer pressure. And man by nature is in bondage to sin. He is in bondage to his own sinful nature and the lusts of his own corrupt heart. — "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil*" (Jeremiah 13:23). Men are taken captive by Satan at his will (1 Timothy 2:26). Man by nature is prone to every kind of evil. It is only the restraining grace of God that keeps any of us from the wicked things we pretend to abhor.

Fallen men and women, without Christ, are bound under the chains of darkness. Your will is held in captivity by the fetters of iniquity. You have resolved many times to change. You may have even succeeded in reforming your outward behavior somewhat; but your character, your nature, your will is in bondage, helpless and hopeless!

Christ alone can set prisoners free! — "*If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed!*" We were "*such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron.*" Then we cried unto the Lord in our trouble, and He saved us out of all our distresses. He brought us out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke our bands in sunder (Psalm 107:10-14).

Fallen man's sentence is fixed and immutable. — "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die!*" God has spoken. There is no reprieve. There is no amnesty. There is no repeal. God's law says the sinner must die. God's holiness says the sinner must die. God's justice says the sinner must die.

Man by nature is under the sentence and curse of God's holy law. The law of God demands your death. You are not on probation. You are on death row. The God of heaven judges you guilty. Your own conscience consents to the verdict. The sentence is passed. The only thing lacking is the appointed day of execution. We died spiritually in our father Adam (Romans 5:12). And every unbelieving sinner must die eternally, because of God's immutable law. Every sinner out of Christ is dead at law.

Is there therefore no hope for a sinner like Barabbas? Must all the guilty forever perish? Will God not have mercy? Is there anyway whereby God can be faithful to His holy law and yet pardon sin? Is there any means whereby God can both satisfy His justice and let the sinner live? God will not show mercy at the expense of His justice. But He will show mercy if justice can be satisfied in a Substitute. Blessed be the name of the Lord, there is hope for sinners, for God has found a Substitute (Job 33:24).

## A Substitute Found

So mark this third fact and rejoice. A Substitute was found to die in Barabbas' place. The Roman soldier came and unlocked Barabbas' prison door, took off his shackles, and said, "Barabbas, you're free to go. Jesus of Nazareth is going to die in your place." That is real substitution. That One who suffered and died as Barabbas' Substitute is our Substitute. His name is Jesus Christ, the Lord. He is God's own, well-beloved Son. He is the only Substitute God can or will accept (Romans 3:24-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24).

The sinner's Substitute must be a suitable person, able and willing to redeem. Whoever undertakes to reconcile the holy God and sinful men must himself be both God and man. He must be God, for only God is able to make infinite satisfaction. And he must be man, for man must be punished. Behold, the God-man, our Savior. Being God He is able to redeem. Being man He is able to suffer. Being the God-man He is an all-sufficient Redeemer, both able and willing to save!

In order to be a Substitute for others, our Redeemer must be perfect and sinless. — “*He knew no sin.*” The Lord Jesus Christ suffered the just punishment due to our sins, as our Substitute. He was made sin for us. He made our sins his own! Oh, wondrous grace! God took His darling Son without the camp. He hung His Son up in our place between two thieves. God forsook His well-beloved Son. He killed His Son! And He buried the body that bore our sin. And by a marvelous transfer of grace, the Lord God has made Christ’s perfect righteousness our righteousness. We have been made the righteousness of God in Him.

### Barabbas Set Free

Now, in the last place, I want you to see that because Christ died in his place, Barabbas was set free. Jesus Christ took Barabbas’ place at Calvary. Therefore Barabbas did not die. There is a glorious truth here. — All of those for whom the Son of God died at Calvary must be set free.

It is not possible for the law to punish my Substitute and punish me too. Not one soul for whom Jesus Christ died shall be found in hell. The cross of Christ can never be discovered a miscarriage. The blood of Christ cannot be spilled in vain. — “*He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.*” I am talking to you about real substitution. Any doctrine that teaches that God will both punish Christ and those for whom Christ died is not substitution and is not the Gospel.

If Christ has my discharge procured,  
And freely in my room endured  
The whole of wrath Divine:  
Payment God cannot twice demand,  
First at my bleeding Surety’s hand,  
And then again at mine!

# Chapter 135

## Lessons from Calvary

### Luke 23:32-43

“And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided [him], saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS**. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:32-43).

Let’s go again with our blessed Savior to that horrible scene of sin and woe, that blessed, glorious scene of mercy, love, and grace, just outside the city of Jerusalem. I have before my mind’s eye the scene of three crosses, three criminals, soldiers, priests, a

religious crowd, all gathered to slaughter the Son of God. Scattered among the others, I see a few weeping women, and in the distance, one or two heart-broken men. There is much to be seen here on the very surface. But there are other things hidden beneath the surface and unobserved by men. I see before me something of the character of God, much about the character of man, a great display of substitution, God's great salvation, a tremendous picture of sin pardoned, a sad picture of sin unpardoned, a Savior despised, a Savior embraced, a sinner forever lost, and a sinner forever saved. I have found a few lessons in this passage that I pray the Spirit of God may be pleased to graciously apply to our hearts.

## 1. How deep, bitter, universal, and vile is the hatred of the human heart for God!

“Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:7).

Oh, how fallen man hates God! We see it in the priests and the scribes. We see in the soldiers and the people. Hatred echoed through Pilate's judgment hall. Malice rang in Herod's court. Envy was the motive behind every word and deed performed on that infamous night by wicked men. The arrest, the scourging, the mockery, the spitting, the smiting, the cries, “*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*”, the wagging the heads, the drunken songs, the nailing, the thieves' railing, everything was but the outpouring of man's utter hatred for God.

Here we see what is in every human heart by nature. The heart of man is enmity against God. Man declared his heart in the crucifixion of God's darling Son. Here is fallen man showing himself openly, making an unconscious confession of his hatred of God.

It was man who erected the cross and nailed the Son of God to it. God gave the wild ass's colt his reins and seems to have said, “Vent the feelings of your heart.” And he did, taking God

by the throat, as it were; man snatched the only begotten Son of God from his Father's heart, and crucified Him with hellish delight.

Reckoning the death of the cross the worst of all deaths, man says, "This is the best way to show my contempt for God. This is exactly what I think of the Son of God." Thus, the enmity of the natural heart speaks out, and man not only confesses publicly that he is a hater of God, but he takes pains to show the intensity of his hatred. He glories in his shame, crying aloud, "*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*"

The cross interprets what is in man's heart. The cross rips the mask of pretended religion off of the face of our race. The cross of Christ exhibits man's heart as a cesspool, overflowing with the malignity of hell.

Most would say, "I don't hate God. I may be indifferent to Him. He may not be in all my thoughts; but I don't hate Him!" If that is so, let men explain their daily crucifixion of the Son of God. What is man's willful unbelief, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh? What is rebellion to Christ, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh? What is blasphemy, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh? What is man's mockery of Christ, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh?

Will you dare look at your hands? They are red, dripping with blood! Whose blood is that? It is the blood of God's own Son! Blood you shed continually in your heart, because you hate God, because you really want to be God yourself!

Reading these lines, you may think I am being harsh. You may cry, "How dare you judge me!" I am not judging you. It is the cross that judges you. I am asking you to judge yourself by it. It is the cross that interprets your purposes and reveals the thoughts and intents of your heart.

Oh, what a revelation of man the cross is! — Man hating God, and hating Him most, when God displayed His love most fully. — Man acting like the devil, taking Satan's side against God. Yes, the cross was a public declaration of man's hatred for God and His Son. The cross is proud man spitting in God's face

and saying, “I am holy. I need no Savior. To hell with God and His Son!” Our Savior asked, “*What think ye of Christ?*” Man’s answer was, “*Crucify Him!*” Man’s heart, his hands, his tongue all combine to scream out hatred for God and His Son. Everything I see in man on Calvary’s hill is hatred, utter hatred for God, the hatred of the human race toward the triune God. That is what your unbelief is: — hatred for God and his Son (1 John 1:7-10; 5:10).

**2. What a horribly evil thing sin must be, if it takes the blood of God’s own Son, the death of heaven’s Darling to put it away!**

What must sin be when, in order to expiate it, the Lord of Glory must die upon the cursed tree as an outcast, a criminal, a curse? What a horribly evil thing sin must be! It is rebellion against God, treason against His throne, man’s attempt to rape and defile the holy Lord God, to drive the Almighty from His throne, to murder the Eternal. Sin is the expression of fallen man’s enmity against God, the display of our natural heart hatred of God. Sin is that which makes us obnoxious to the holy Lord God. Sin is the defilement of our race. Sin has brought us under the curse of God’s holy law. Sin has put us under the sentence of death, eternal death. Sin shuts the door of hope upon all the human race.

It is no easy thing for sin to be put away. No carnal sacrifice can put away sin (Hebrews 10:1-7).

“Not all the blood of beasts  
On Jewish altars slain  
Could give the guilty conscience peace,  
Or wash away the stain.”

No work of man can put away one sin. No amount of repentance can put away sin. Not even our faith can put away sin.

“Not all the labors of my hands  
Can fulfill Thy law’s demands;  
Could my zeal no languor know,

Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Christ must save, and Christ alone!”

Even God himself cannot, in His pure, absolute character as God, put away sin. If sin is to be put away, it must be put away by the sin-atonement death and substitutionary sacrifice of the incarnate God, the God-man Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. But His sacrifice was enough. He died but once; and once was enough. That is the meaning of these words. — “*Now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*” Christ’s sufferings and death for sin are of infinite value, merit, and efficacy. Therefore, He suffered for sin only once. He appeared once in the end of the world to put away sin; and He has done it.

Our Lord Jesus Christ put away the guilt of sin by his atoning sacrifice. He put away the punishment of it by His sufferings and death as our Substitute. The incarnate Son of God put away the penalty of the law by His satisfaction of Divine justice. He put away the consequences of sin by His obedience unto death. He puts away the dominion of sin in His people by the power of His grace in the new birth. He puts away the filth of sin by His sanctifying grace. And He shall put away the very being of sin in resurrection glory.

This work of putting away sin was accomplished by Him bearing our sin in His own body upon the cursed tree. He carried it and took it away. This is what was pictured in the Old Testament type of the scapegoat.

The Lord Jesus has removed sin from us as far as the east is from the west, by finishing and making an end of it. He disannulled and abolished it, in so far as the law and justice of God is concerned. When He paid our debt, He cancelled it in one day, by His one sacrifice. In one great day, the whole work was done (Zechariah 3:9). Our sins, being forever, effectually put away by the sacrifice of Christ, shall never be found and can never be charged to us again (Jeremiah 50:20; Romans 4:8).

“My sin, (O the bliss of this glorious thought!)

My sin, not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more. --  
Praise the Lord! It is well with my soul!"

### 3. How immeasurable and infinite the love of God in Christ is

I see in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ love to the uttermost, unquenched and unquenchable (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10). Man pours floods upon this love to quench it, but it grows more intense. What patience with man's utmost malice; what forbearance with his sin! — "*Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.*" Was ever love like this? — So vast, so free, so overflowing. Sin abounding, grace did much more abound (John 13:1; Ephesians 3:14-19. — O how He loves!

### 4. The purpose of our great God and Savior is unalterably fixed, relentlessly pursued, and perfectly executed.

Our Savior came here to do a work (Matthew 1:21), a work appointed to Him and purposed by Him from everlasting (Psalm 40; Hebrews 10); and He was determined to accomplish it, "*straightened,*" as He put it, until it was accomplished. It shall be accomplished. It shall be finished. He had come here to accomplish death; and it shall be accomplished (Luke 9:30-31).

How will he do it? By what means shall the holy Lamb of God be sacrificed? The altar shall be built, built by man's enmity. The sacrifice shall be slain, slain by man's hatred. The work shall be done, done by man's will. It shall be done exactly according to the purpose of God (Psalms 76:10; Acts 2:23).

## 5. How willing, how anxious the Lord Jesus Christ is to save poor, lost sinners!

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is a vivid declaration that “*where sin abounded grace did much more abound!*” What is the meaning of the cross? Why was our Lord Jesus nailed to the cursed tree? Behold the dying thief and hear the answer. The Son of God came into the world to save sinners! Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost!

The dying thief is a true specimen of God’s elect. This man appears to have done nothing but evil all his life. We know nothing about him, except that he was a thief, a thief who had executed his crimes with violence, a thief who continued to blaspheme, even as he was being executed, a thief who was loved and chosen of God (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

Why was Immanuel’s blood poured out at Calvary? Christ Jesus poured out His life’s blood upon the cursed tree to wash away sin. Here I see it washing away the sins of one like myself, whose heart and life were as black as hell. Why did Christ suffer and die? It was to pardon the most guilty. It was not merely to save us from hell, but to open Paradise to the chief of sinners, to open it at once; not after years of torment, but “*today.*” Today “*shalt thou be with me.*” Yes, the Lord Jesus went back to heaven with this saved thief in His hands. What an efficacy there is in the cross! — What grace! — What glory! — What cleansing! — What healing! — What justice! — What blessedness!

By His death upon the cursed tree, the Son of God delivers and saves His people from their sins! Satisfying the justice of God, He plucked us as brands from the burning, conquered hell, and defeated the devil and cast him down to hell. The first sinner saved by the cross, after it had been erected upon Calvary’s hill, was a wretched, justly condemned thief; and the Son of God went up to heaven with him to join in that joy that is in heaven over one sinner who repents.

## 6. How near a person may be to hell and yet be saved!

That thief was, as it were, upon the very brink of hell. He had one foot in the pit. Hell was in his heart. Hell had been his life. Soon, hell must be his portion forever! He had done nothing but evil continually all the days of his life. In the very last hour of his life, he is heard blaspheming and railing against the Lord Jesus. Yet, he was plucked from the fire by omnipotent mercy! — Saved by the Son of God! He was just about to step into everlasting damnation, when the omnipotent hand of the Son of God seized him and lifted him up to Paradise!

Oh, what grace is here! What boundless love! What power to save! Who after this need despair? Truly our Lord Jesus Christ is mighty to save!

## 7. How near you may be to Christ and yet be lost forever!

The other thief was as near the Savior as the one who was saved. Yet, he perished. He went to hell from the very side of the Son of God, from the very presence of Immanuel!

There are two men. Both are thieves. Both are damned. Both are lost. Both are without God, without Christ, without hope. Both are in the immediate presence of the crucified Christ. One is taken up to glory. One is taken up to heaven. The other is cast down to hell. What made the difference?

*“The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 6:23). — Throughout the Word of God we are constantly assured of these two facts. *First*, if anyone goes to hell, it is his own fault alone, his own responsibility, altogether the result of what he has done, and that for which he alone must bear the blame forever. *Second*, if anyone is saved, if anyone goes to heaven, it is God’s work alone, altogether the result of that which God has done, and that for which God alone must have the praise forever.

*“The wages of sin is death!”* — Sin is what we all are by

nature; and sin is all that we do in a state of rebellion against God. It is as impossible for a sinner to do good as it is for water to be dry. Our corrupt nature corrupts all our thoughts, feelings, words, and deeds. As a corrupt fountain only brings forth corrupt water, so a corrupt heart only brings forth corruption. That means that the very plowing of the wicked is an abomination to God, and even our righteousnesses are filthy rags in his sight (Proverbs 21:4; Isaiah 64:6). Sin is also our choice. We all drink iniquity like water (Job 15:16). And that which sin deserves is death, eternal death, which is eternal separation from God and the eternal vengeance of His holy wrath. Death is the debt God owes to sin. And God always pays His debts. The one thief went to hell because he ate the fruit of his own way.

*“But the gift of God is eternal life!”* — Eternal life comes to guilty sinners not as a debt, or a reward for something we have done, but as the free grace gift of God. The new birth, which is the beginning of eternal life in the soul, is the gift of God. Faith in Christ is the gift of God. Heavenly glory, which is the consummation of eternal life, is also the gift of God. Death, hell, and judgment are things we earn by sin. But grace, life, and heaven are things freely given to sinners *“through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*

Christ, having paid the debt of sin for His people by His death upon the cross, has made it right and just for the holy Lord God, who must punish sin, to give eternal life to all for whom He died. Through the merits of Christ, through His blood and righteousness, God gives eternal life to everyone who believes on Him. Even the faith by which we receive this gift is the gift of God and the result of His operation of grace (Ephesians 2:8; Colossians 1:12). Faith in Christ is not the cause of God’s gift, but the result of it. If you now believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God has given you eternal life. It is altogether his work. — *“Salvation is of the Lord!”*

Can anyone be nearer to Christ than that thief was? Looking at Him, hearing Him, speaking to Him, He was lost after all! Be warned. Outward nearness, religious duties, familiarity with the Word of God, baptism, eating and drinking the symbols of the

Savior's body and blood, none of these things can save. You may be very near Christ, and yet not be in Christ. Salvation is not being near Christ. Salvation is being found in Christ.

**8. Because he saved others, the Lord Jesus Christ could not save Himself.**

*“He saved others; Himself He cannot save”* (Matthew 27:42; Mark 15:31). That is the very essence of the Gospel. The Son of God died as our Substitute. In order to save us He had to sacrifice himself (Hebrews 10:9-14; 1 Peter 3:18; 1:18-20; 2:24). In the light of all these things, my heart cries, — *“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”*

# Chapter 136

## “Beholding These Things”

Luke 23:24-49

“And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required...48 And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. 49 And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things” (Luke 23:24-49).

In this portion of Holy Scripture God the Holy Spirit describes the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ when He was hanged upon the cursed tree, bearing our sin in His own body and made sin for us. Let us take our place with all His acquaintances and the women who followed Him from Galilee, “*beholding these things.*” We have before us an amazing, marvelous record. It is amazing and marvelous in our eyes when we remember Who suffered these things. — The great Sufferer before us is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the only truly holy and good man ever to live in this world. It is amazing and marvelous in our eyes when we remember for whom He suffered. The Son of God suffered the wrath of God for sinners who are by nature the enemies of God (Romans 5:6-8). And it is amazing and marvelous in our eyes when we remember why He suffered. The cause of His great sorrow and agony of body, soul, and spirit was the fact that the Son of God suffered for sin, as the sin-bearer. “*Christ died for our sins!*”

## The Sorrow in Gethsemane

We have seen our Savior's sorrow in Gethsemane, when He prayed three times, "*O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.*" Such was the shock of His holy soul at the thought and prospect of being made sin that our holy Redeemer broke out into a sweat of blood. Luke describes it in these words. — "*Being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground*" (Luke 22:44).

## The Scourging of Gabbatha

We have seen the scourging of Gabbatha too. Our Lord was condemned in a mockery of justice at Pilate's judgment hall, called Gabbatha (John 19:13). There He was delivered into the hands of cruel, barbaric Roman soldiers to be scourged. They took Him into the common judgment hall, where they gathered an entire band of soldiers, between five and twelve hundred of them, to scourge our Savior. They stripped Him. They mercilessly whipped Him with a Roman scourge. They mocked Him. They beat Him with their fists. They spat upon Him!

*"Then they led Him away to crucify Him!"* We have before us Luke's inspired narrative of the crucifixion at Mt. Calvary. May God the Holy Spirit Who gave us this record now fill our hearts with reverence as we meditate upon it and seek to worship the Lamb of God Who was there sacrificed for our sins. The verses before us describe...

## The Slaughter at Golgotha

(Luke 23:33) "And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left."

Matthew wrote, "*And when they were come unto a place called*

*Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull.*” “*Golgotha*” means “*place of a skull.*” Golgotha was just another name for Calvary. It was called Golgotha because in this place of slaughter, people who were stoned to death or crucified were simply covered over with a little dirt. Consequently, in a matter of time skulls and bones were everywhere.

## God's Sovereignty

In this scene of slaughter at Golgotha the Holy Spirit shows us a tremendous display of God’s glorious sovereignty in three things. *First*, we see here the fulfillment of Scripture by men who had no regard for the Scriptures. The soldiers who tormented our Lord had no more regard for the Scriptures than hogs have for diamonds. Yet, they did exactly what God ordained that they would do and said that they would do (Acts 4:27-28; 13:27-29). The Lord God made even those men who murdered his Son to be His witnesses.

The soldiers who mocked Him, gave him vinegar to drink (Luke 23:36-37; Matthew 27:34). Their mixture of vinegar (flat wine that had gone sour and bitter) mixed with gall was thought to be a mixture that would prolong one’s life. It was given by the soldiers because they must, according to God’s decree, fulfill the prophecy of Psalm 69:21. — “*They gave Me also gall for My meat; and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink.*” John Gill wrote...

“This potion of vinegar with gall, was an aggravating circumstance in our Lord’s sufferings, being given to Him when He had a violent thirst upon Him; and was an emblem of the bitter cup of God’s wrath, He had already tasted of in the garden, and was about to drink up”

“*When he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*” — Our Lord refused to drink of the mixture because He was determined to suffer the wrath of God for us without any distraction or intoxication of mind. And He refused to drink of it because He would make all to know that He would do nothing to prolong His life, but was willing to die now that His hour, the fullness of time,

had come.

Matthew tells us that they parted his garments, casting lots for his vesture (Matthew 27:35). Again, we are reminded that the Lord God Almighty was in total control of all the affairs of this day of infamy. The barbaric soldiers did nothing except what God had long before said they would do. This parting of our Lord's garments was a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18. — "*They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture.*"

Then, like the women and His acquaintances who followed Him, Matthew tells us, "*sitting down they watched him there*" (Matthew 27:36). After they had scourged Him, mocked Him, beat Him, and crucified Him, those hardened men sat down to watch the Lamb of God die. Like little boys cruelly throw a worm into a fire just to watch it wiggle, squirm, and die, they watched the Son of God; but to their utter astonishment, there was no wiggling, no squirming, and no dying until He gave up the ghost by His own sovereign will.

Notice also that our Lord was crucified between two thieves, as the prophet Isaiah declared He must be (Isaiah 53:12; Luke 23:32; Matthew 27:38). That is the *second* thing I want you to see here. These two thieves also give us a display of God's sovereign, distinguishing grace in salvation. You do not need me to remind you that one of these thieves was plucked as a firebrand from the burning out of the very jaws of hell by God's sovereign grace, while the other was left to suffer the just consequences of his sin. Let it never be forgotten by us that if we are saved, we are saved because God did it. The only distinction between God's saints and the damned in hell is the distinction that grace has made (1 Corinthians 4:7; 15:10; Romans 9:16).

*Third*, here at Calvary we see a great display of God's sovereignty in causing reprobate, unbelieving men to declare His truth, to declare the very essence of the Gospel, though they never knew it themselves. We do not know because we are not told, but it may be that it was the testimony of spineless Pilate, the testimony of these wicked, taunting, jeering Jews, and the testimony of the mocking chief priests, scribes and elders that became the instruments by which God taught that elect thief the

Gospel and brought him to faith in Christ. Hear now the testimony that he heard.

Pilate declared, “*This is Jesus*” (Matthew 27:37). — “*Jesus of Nazareth*” (John 19:19). — “*The King of the Jews*” (v. 38). — This proclamation was made in Hebrew the language of religion, in Greek the language of philosophy, and in Latin the language of science. That was no accident. There is no true religion, no true philosophy, and no true science that does not begin with the acknowledgment and confession that Jesus Christ is King.

The priests, scribes, elders, and people, danced in a drunken, hellish party around Immanuel’s cross, and in their blasphemy spoke the truth of God as distinctly as inspired apostles. — “*Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days*” (Matthew 27:40). Though they knew it not, those religious ritualists proclaimed the fact of our Lord’s death and resurrection. He destroyed the temple of His body in death. He raised it up again in three days.

Mockingly they cried, “*He saved others; Himself He cannot save*” (Matthew 27:42; Luke 23:35). That is the very essence of the Gospel. The Son of God died as our Substitute. Because He saved us He had to sacrifice Himself.

Then, they jeered, “*He trusted in God*” (Matthew 27:43). Our Lord Jesus Christ, as a man, lived by faith, in all things trusting God His Father. Thus He taught us how to honor, obey, and live for God in this world by faith. But there is more. The Holy Spirit tells us repeatedly that we are saved and justified “*by the faith of Jesus Christ.*”

After that, they jeered again. “*He said, I am the Son of God*” (Matthew 27:43). Infidels choose to ignore it, but these people heard His doctrine plainly. Jesus Christ of Nazareth openly, publicly declared Himself to be the Son of God. And that is who He is! He is God and man in one glorious Person. He was the Godman in Mary’s womb, the Godman in His obedience for us, the Godman when He died upon the tree, and the Godman when He rose from the dead. Christ is the Godman exalted to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him.

And the hellish crowd declared, in Luke 23:35, that He who saved others, but could not save Himself is “*the Christ, the chosen of God*” (Psalm 89:19; Isaiah 42:1; 43:10; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

## Scene of Guilt

But there is more, much more, that I see as I stand before my dying Savior, “*beholding these things.*” Calvary is a scene of great guilt, guilt that deserved death. — “*There were also two other malefactors led with Hm to be put to death*” (v. 32). The Lord Jesus was crucified between these two murderous malefactors, as if He were the greatest of the three. — “*He was numbered with the transgressors*” (Isaiah 53:12). He was “*reckoned among the transgressors*” (Luke 22:37). And in a very real sense, He was made the greatest of transgressors, for He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. And when He was made sin, He was made a curse for us, and made to die under the wrath of God in our place. He did not merely bear the curse for us. He was made a curse for us (Galatians 3:13), because our guilt was made his guilt (Psalms 40:12; 69:5).

## Place of Infinite Love

Calvary is the place of indescribable, infinite love, eternal love, enduring love, self-denying love, saving love, everlasting love, Divine love. Hear love welling up in the breaking heart of the Son of God, our crucified Substitute, as He prays, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” (v. 34; John 13:1; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10; Romans 5:6-8; 2 Corinthians 8:9).

## Grace and Salvation

“*Beholding these things,*” I have before my eye a scene of abounding grace in the salvation of sinners.

(Luke 23:32-34) “And there were also two other,

malefactors, led with him to be put to death. (33) And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. (34) Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.”

(Luke 23:39-43) “And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. (40) But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? (41) And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. (42) And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. (43) And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Upon the basis of His blood atonement, the Lord Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of the very people who mocked Him and crucified Him; and He obtained it. That forgiveness He obtained is made manifest in the saving operations of His grace upon the dying thief. The Savior said to him, “*Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise!*” Here we have a portrait of God’s sovereign saving grace that is full of instruction and of consolation.

The whole of salvation is summed up in the two words spoken by our Lord to the thief — “*with me.*” He was with Him in the covenant, with Him in His obedience and with Him in His death, and now he is with Him in Paradise. — “*With me*” is all the thief wanted. — “*With me*” is heaven. — “*With me*” is salvation.

None are beyond the reach of omnipotent mercy. The Lord Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him. Our great God and Savior is as willing to save as He is able to save. His salvation is by grace alone, without works. This dying thief was justified, sanctified, washed clean, and glorified in one great, single stroke of mercy!

Learn this too. — Those saints nearest death are nearest

glory. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

## Judgment and Mercy

“*Beholding these things,*” I see both great judgment and great mercy.

(Luke 23:44-45) “And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. (45) And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.”

The three hours of darkness over all the earth seems to me to be a declaration of God’s great wrath and judgment against sin. All who are without Christ are in great darkness; and darkness shall be their portion forever if they die without our Savior. But the rent veil is a declaration of God’s infinite goodness and mercy. The blood of Christ has opened the way for poor sinners like us to come to God (Hebrews 10:19-22).

## Death Accomplished

Once more, “*beholding these things,*” I see death accomplished. — “*And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost*” (v.46). Our Savior came here to die; and He accomplished His mission. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. His accomplished death has brought life and immortality to us, and gives us peace. Like those described in verse 48, I smite my breast in repentance, “*beholding these things.*” Blessed be His name, His death is the death of death for this poor sinner! Believing on the Son of God, I shall never die. — “*Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*”

# Chapter 137

## One Taken, the Other Left

### Luke 23:39-43

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

He did not learn it until he was in hell; but in hell the rich man learned that between him and Lazarus “*there is a great gulf fixed; so that they who would pass*” from one side to the other cannot (Luke 16:26). So it has been, so it shall be, and so it is. The human race is divided into two parts: sheep and goats, elect and reprobate, Jacobs loved of God and Esaus hated by Him, vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath. Goats will never become sheep; and sheep will never become goats. Elect will never become reprobate; and reprobate will never become elect. Jacob will never become Esau; and Esau will never become Jacob. Vessels of mercy will never become vessels of wrath; and vessels of wrath will never become vessels of mercy.

The gulf was fixed in eternity. The division was made in the decree of God. The distinction was established in eternity. It will be made clear to all at Christ’s second coming, in that great day when the Son of God sits in judgment upon His Great White

Throne (Luke 17:33-36). In that day, “*one shall be taken, and the other left.*” As it shall be in that day, so it is today. When the appointed time of love is come for the salvation of God’s chosen, one is taken, and the other left.

We see this fact vividly set before us in the two thieves who were crucified with the Lord Jesus. Only Luke was inspired to tell us of our Savior’s abundant mercy and distinguishing grace bestowed upon this dying thief. It is a story that deserves to be written in gold, told often, and remembered by all.

### Salvation by Grace

The *first* thing that is obvious in this story is the fact that salvation is altogether the work of God’s free grace, altogether without works. This dying thief had no merit of any kind. He had no pre-disposition of heart toward the Son of God. He rendered no service to the Lord. He observed no ordinance. He was not baptized. He never united with, or even visited a church. He never observed the Lord’s Supper.

Everything we know about this man tells us that he was a depraved sinner, a moral degenerate, whose life of infamous shame was about to be ended by penal execution. Yet, this poor, wretched, degenerate man was saved. No explanation can be given for that fact except this: — “*By grace ye are saved*” (Romans 9:16; Ephesians 2:1-5, 8-9; Titus 3:3-7).

### Sovereign, Distinguishing Grace

*Second*, God’s saving grace, in every instance of it, is set before us in Holy Scripture as sovereign, distinguishing grace. Certainly, that is obvious in the story of these two thieves. Both of the other malefactors crucified with the Lord Jesus were guilty thieves, justly condemned. Matthew and Mark tell us that both joined in the rabble of Pharisees and the soldiers, mocking the Lord of Glory and railing upon him.

Then there was a sudden change. One of the thieves ceased to

curse the Savior and sued Him for mercy, crying, “*Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.*” Both were equally near the Savior, one on His right hand and the other on His left. Both saw and heard all that happened during the six hours that He hung on the cross. Both were dying men. Both were suffering acute, torturous pain. Both were alike wicked sinners. Both needed forgiveness. Yet, one died as he had lived, hardened in sin, proud and without repentance, unbelieving and without hope. The other repented, believed, cried to the Son of God for mercy, and was saved.

What made the difference? Grace! Grace alone! The penitent thief was made penitent because the Lord Jesus gave him life and faith by the power of His omnipotent grace. He snatched the dying thief from the very brink of hell and took him with Him to heaven as a trophy of His rich, free and sovereign grace. His conversion cannot be accounted for in any other way. We can only say, “*Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight*” (Matthew 11:26).

How can two people hear the same sermon, from the same preacher, in the same condition, and one be converted, while the other remains dead in sin? How can one be totally indifferent and the other bowed in brokenness before God? How can one pray for mercy, while the other blasphemes? How can one see and the other remain blind? There is only one answer that can be given to those questions. — “*The LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel*” (Exodus 11:7; 1 Corinthians 4:7). In election, in redemption and in effectual calling it is God, and God alone, who makes the difference between men.

## Timely Grace

*Third*, this dying thief shows us an example of the fact that grace is always on time. Many say, concerning this man, “He was saved just in the nick of time.” But that is hardly the case. He was saved precisely at the divinely appointed time. He could not have been saved at any other time; and he could not have been saved at a better time.

He could not have been saved at any other time, because, for him, this was *“the time of love,”* when he must be called. As illustrated in Gomer, the Prodigal Son, Onesimus, and this dying thief, there is an appointed time for the salvation of each of God’s chosen (Galatians 4:4-6). Some are saved in youth. Some are saved in the middle of life. And some are saved in old age. But all who are saved are saved at the only time they could be saved, because for each of us it took the whole experience of our ruin to bring us to our Savior.

And he could not have been saved at a better time. You might think, “But, wouldn’t it have been better for him to have lived longer, that he might serve and honor Christ upon the earth?” Let me answer that question by asking you what human being has ever been more useful. What man has ever been more influential for good? What person has been such a blessing to so many others? Who has ever been more instrumental for the glory of his maligned, blasphemed and ridiculed Redeemer than this man?

Every saved sinner is saved at God’s appointed time; and each one is saved at the best time.

## The Means of Grace

The *fourth* thing that strikes me about the conversion of this man is this: — The means of grace is not always obvious. We know that *“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”* (Romans 10:17). We know that sinners are *“born-again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever... And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you”* (1 Peter 1:23-25). But many point to the dying thief and say, “That man was saved without hearing the Gospel.” Was he? — No.

Let me remind you of the things he heard, as he hung upon the cross. I do not know what he heard, or did not hear beforehand. But as he hung by his dying Savior, he heard and saw the Gospel as clearly as anyone ever could. He heard the Lord Jesus hailed as *“the King of Israel”* (Matthew 27:42). He heard that the Man hanging beside him had claimed to be the Son

of God. — “*He said, I am the Son of God*” (Matthew 27:43). He heard the chief priests and scribes say, “*He saved others; Himself He cannot save*” (Mark 15:31). He heard the Lord Jesus Himself pray, probably just as he and the other thief had railed upon him, “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34). How many times he heard people that day crying, “*Save!*” *Save!*” “*Save!*” to the Savior, as they derided Him! He read Pilate’s testimony, “*This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*” (Luke 23:38; John 19:19). And he saw the Lamb of God dying as a substitute in the place of a guilty man (Barabbas), who was released from death because He died in his place.

## The Character of Faith

*Fifth*, the dying thief shows us the character of true, saving faith. This man stands before us as a defining example of God-given faith (vv. 39-42).

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

Here are seven things that are always characteristics of that faith that comes to chosen, redeemed sinners by the gift and operation of God the Holy Spirit. True faith...

1. Is the result of conviction, arises from Holy Spirit conviction.
2. Acknowledges justice. — Oh fall down and own that the sentence of the law, which curses you for sin, is just. Denounce the pride and self-righteousness of your heart.
3. Confesses sin.
4. Confesses Christ’s holiness. — “*This man has done nothing amiss.*”
5. Confesses Christ as Lord and King.

6. Looks to Christ alone for mercy. — “*Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*”

7. Obtains God’s salvation. — “*And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise*” (v. 43).

This man’s faith was, in all those respects, precisely the same as that which God gives to every heaven-born soul. Yet, his faith in Christ is the most remarkable display of faith to be seen in all the Word of God, the most remarkable faith to be found in the history of the world! He trusted Christ as God his Savior, his Lord and King, when all others had forsaken Him, as He was dying!

### A Willing Savior

*Sixth*, this inspired narrative declares in bold letters that the Lord Jesus Christ is willing to save all who come to God by Him, and “*able to save to the uttermost*” (Hebrews 7:25). The Lord Jesus Christ is able to save any sinner in any circumstance, in any place, at any time. And He is willing to save. But that is not all. — The Son of God will save all who come to God by Him (John 6:37-40).

### Glory Near

*Seventh*, this brief history of the dying thief tells us how near we are to Glory. Heavenly Glory is but a breath away! What a consolation that fact ought to be to all God’s saints, especially when we find ourselves dying. Heaven is but a breath away. Our Savior said to this new-born soul, who would soon cease to live in his tortured body, “*Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.*” Without any past works to commend him, without possibility of future goodness, altogether by the work of Christ, he was assured of everlasting salvation with Christ in heaven!

That word “*today*” speaks volumes. It tells us that as soon as this earthly house, this tabernacle of clay is dissolved, we have a

house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. — *“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord”* (Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 4:17-5:9). And in that blessed state, in that place called heaven, we shall be with Christ! What is heaven like? Look yonder to the assembly around the throne. What are their joys, their feelings, their happiness? All is explained by this simple statement: — They are with Christ.

If the sheep are with the Shepherd, if the members are with the Head, if the saints are with Him who loved them and gave Himself for them, if the Bride is with her Beloved, if the redeemed are with the Redeemer, if the saved are with the Savior, all is well. Nothing is lacking. Their joy is full!

I do not know and cannot describe what heaven is; but the name of that city is Jehovah-shammah, *“the LORD is there”* (Ezekiel 48:35). I want no more. I ask no more. I can have no more. — *“Christ is All!”* Well did the Psalmist sing, *“In Thy presence is fulness of joy”* (Psalms 17:15; 27:4).

“Jesus, Thou art the sinner's Friend; as such I look to Thee.

Now in the bowels of Thy love, O Lord, remember me.  
Remember Thy pure word of grace, Remember Calvary,  
Remember all Thy dying groans, and then remember me.

Thou wondrous Advocate with God, I yield myself to Thee;

While Thou are sitting on the throne, Dear Lord, remember me.

I own I'm guilty, own I'm vile; yet Thy salvation's free;  
Then in Thy all abounding grace, dear Lord, remember me.

However forsaken or distressed, however oppressed I be,  
However afflicted here on earth, do Thou remember me.  
And when I close my eyes in death, and creature helps all flee,  
Then, O my dear Redeemer God, I pray remember me.”

## One Taken, the Other Left

When Joseph had interpreted the chief butler's dream, how pathetically does he plead with him! "*Think on me when it shall be well with thee*" (Gen. 40:14). But such is the base ingratitude of man, that all was in vain. When the butler was restored, he cared nothing for Joseph in prison. Exalted men seldom care for needy souls. But it is not so with the King of kings. He is ever the Friend of poor sinners. He remembers us in our low estate. For us He hung on the accursed tree between two accursed sinners. One was taken, the other left. You and I are represented by both.

In the saved thief we see the marvellous power of God's sovereign grace. Here is a reviler changed into a suppliant. What caused the change? Let every proud notion of self-righteousness, self-worth and freewill forever perish! Fall down before the Son of God and adore His distinguishing grace. One malefactor was left to himself and went to hell blaspheming. The other died in faith, trusting Christ and praying, worshipping him. He was snatched, by omnipotent grace, from the jaws of hell, as a brand our Savior would not allow to be burned. Do you see your nature to be as wicked and your state as desperate as this thief's? If so, your soul is humbled before God. Do you see that nothing but the same grace of Christ can save you? If so, you will exalt the free grace of God in Christ. Oh my soul, exalt the mercy, love and grace of Christ!

Oh, may God the Holy Spirit teach you to pray as he taught this man to pray, "*Lord, Remember me*. There is no Savior but You, no salvation but by You. I am a hopeless, helpless sinner; unless You save me, I must be damned forever. You are the King. Yours is the kingdom. Oh bring me with You into Your kingdom!" If God will grant you such faith in the Savior, Christ Jesus, you will soon be in Glory with the same Lord, who "*is rich*" in mercy "*unto all who call on Him*" (Romans 10:12).

Oh, what a great magnet the crucified Christ is to poor, needy, helpless sinners! — "*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*. This he said, signifying what death he should die" (John 12:32-33). Let every member of Immanuel's

Bride cry as we are taught of God, “*Draw me, we will run after Thee*” (Song of Solomon 1:4).

# Chapter 138

## The Rent Veil

### Luke 23:44-45

“And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst” (Luke 23:44-45).

In these two verses before us we have Luke’s very brief account of our Savior’s last three hours of agony upon the cursed tree, the last three hours of torture he endured for us as our Substitute, because he was made sin for us. Let us ever read these inspired narratives with reverence, with hearts broken over sin, and yet rejoicing at the forgiveness of sin obtained at such a price. May God the Holy Spirit sanctify our hearts and minds as we once more attempt to meditate upon our Lord’s sufferings, and seek to know and worship him who suffered all the hell of God’s holy wrath for us.

### The Darkness

The Spirit of God here tells us that there was darkness over all the earth for three hours. This was not a natural solar eclipse, but a supernatural one, an eclipse specifically performed by God on this occasion. It was the eclipse that the prophet Amos prophesied. — *“It shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day”* (Amos 8:9).

The darkness lasted for three hours. Men in other parts of the world, who had no idea what was going on in Jerusalem, spoke of

it. A man named Dionysius, living in Egypt at the time, said, “Either the Divine Being suffers, or suffers with him that suffers, or the frame of the world is dissolving.” Apparently, this eclipse was a complete eclipse of the sun engulfing the entire world with darkness at one time! For three hours, from high noon until three o’clock, the sun refused to shine. Thus the Lord God gives a vivid, symbolic display of four things.

**1. The Heinousness of the Crime Being Committed**

– Though our Savior died and was slaughtered by the hands of wicked men exactly according to the purpose, will, and decree of God almighty for the salvation of his elect, God’s decree did not in any way excuse their sin in crucifying him (Acts 2:22-23).

**2. The Blackness, Darkness, and Blindness of Men’s Hearts By Nature**

— No impression was made upon these men, though God performed miracles unheard of, before or since, all around them. The fact is man’s heart by nature is so blind that no acts of providence, either in goodness or in judgment, can be seen by him, unless God takes the scales off his eyes.

**3. The Emptiness and Darkness of Christless Religion**

— Judaism had become mere ritualism. As such, it was altogether darkness. Religion without Christ, without life, without faith is darkness, no matter how orthodox it appears!

**4. The Darkness that Passed Upon and Engulfed Our Savior’s Holy Soul When He was Made Sin For Us**

— Matthew tells us, at “*about the ninth hour,*” about three o’clock in the afternoon, which was about the time of the slaying and offering of the evening sacrifice, which was an eminent type of Christ, “*Jesus cried with a loud voice.*” He cried out as one in great distress, having been silent during the three hours darkness, patiently bearing all his soul’s sufferings, under a sense of divine

wrath, the hiding of his Father's face, and his conflicts with the powers of darkness; but now, in the anguish of his soul, he breaks out with a cry that pierces the darkness, "*saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*"

Here our Savior speaks as a man, the man chosen, made, ordained, and anointed by God with the oil of gladness above his fellows. As a man, our Lord was upheld and strengthened by the Father, just as we are. As a man, he trusted God, loved him, and prayed to him, just as we do; only he did so perfectly, without sin. Though now the Father hid his face from him, still he expresses strong faith in him and love for him.

When he is said to be, "*forsaken*" of God, the meaning is not that he was separated from the love of God or did not know the reason for his abandonment. Our Surety now stood in our place bearing our sins. He, therefore, had to endure abandonment by God the Father to satisfy justice.

This cry, "*My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?*" expresses the very soul of his sufferings as our Substitute. Indeed, all the wailings and howlings of the damned in hell to all eternity will fall infinitely short of expressing the evil and bitterness of sin. But here we see how vile a thing sin is. When God found our sin upon his darling Son, he forsook him in wrath! Whenever we read these words, "*My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?*", hear them, or think about them, we ought to immediately realize that we have been ransomed by an indescribably great price, that the Lord our God is infinitely holy and just, that he must and will punish all sin, and that the Lord God almighty loves his people with an infinite, indescribable, everlasting love! And we should be convinced by our Savior's cry, from his deep agony of soul, that God's elect shall never be forsaken, neither in this world nor in the world to come!

## The Veil Rent

After that, the Lord Jesus cried again, with a loud voice, and "*yielded up the ghost.*" Our Lord's strength was not abated. His

last word was not the gasping breath of a failing life, but the triumphant shout of a conquering King. The Son of God voluntarily laid down his life for his sheep. He did not lose his spirit; he dismissed it. His work was finished. His mission was complete. Therefore, he laid down his life for his people, voluntarily, as our Surety, suffering vicariously as our Substitute. And he did so triumphantly, conquering sin, death, Satan, and hell for us.

Then, we read, “*and the veil in the temple was rent.*” Matthew is more detailed and more graphic in his account. He wrote, “*And, behold, the veil in the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom*” (Matthew 27:51). The typical, symbolic veil was rent. And, at the same instant, the true veil was rent. What is the meaning of this rent veil? Why was it rent?

Try to picture what was happening in Jerusalem. Just a short distance from Mt. Calvary stood Mt. Moriah and the Jews’ temple. It is at the hour of the evening sacrifice. The sun has been darkened by the hand of God for three hours. Thousands were gathered in Jerusalem for the passover. Many were still at Calvary. Others had made their way to the temple. The priest in all his gorgeous robes is going through the now empty rituals of the Jews’ Passover. As he meanders around in the holy place, suddenly, the veil of the temple, separating the holy place from the most holy place, was ripped apart before his eyes, ripped from top to bottom, as if God himself had taken it in his hands and ripped it.

Can you imagine the shock of that pretentious priest? Can you imagine the shock of the people as they looked within the holy of holies? It was, except for the priest, utterly empty! The ark of the covenant was not there. The mercy-seat was not there. Though the temple was rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity, the ark of the covenant and the mercy-seat were never recovered and never brought into Solomon’s temple.

“There were five things in Solomon's temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, which were not in the second temple, which was erected after the Babylonish captivity. Five memorials or tokens of God's special presence were there

wanting. One was the ark of the covenant; another, the fire from heaven upon the bronze altar; the third, the Shechinah, or cloud that rested upon the mercy-seat; the fourth, the Urim and Thummin which were in the breast-plate of the high-priest; and the fifth, the spirit of prophecy. For though there were the prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, at the time of, and shortly after, the restoration; yet the spirit of prophecy ceased with Malachi, and did not reappear until John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus.” (J. C. Philpot)

For centuries, the Jewish priests faked keeping the passover! We can only imagine the criminally selfish motives behind their actions. But now their empty, sham religion was exposed to all.

Suddenly, as though the sky opened, we are lifted up and carried from the earth into heaven, from the carnal into the spiritual, from mortality into immortality, of which it is written by John when he was in the Spirit, — *“I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.”* — In that Temple all is full!

We have no need of a physical temple, for we are the temple of God. Seated now in the holy place with Christ, we understand and see clearly that Christ is all. Everything in the carnal, earthly, material temple spoke of him. Christ is our Priest and our Altar. He is the Lamb of God, our sacrificed Passover, and our Mercy-seat. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Shekinah-glory, the brightness of the glory of the triune God. Let us now turn aside, as Moses did at the bush, and see this great sight. What does it mean?

**1. The veil was rent, not consumed by fire.** — Had it been consumed with fire, we might miss the meaning of the picture. Our Lord by his death did not destroy the way of access to God. He opened it. Now, we go through the rent veil by his blood into the holiest. The new and living way, by which we come to God, is paved with gold and sprinkled with blood.

**2. The veil was rent while the temple was still**

**standing in Jerusalem.** — Had the earthquake, that rent the rocks and opened graves, struck down the temple or shattered its walls, men might have said that it was the earthquake that rent the veil. But now it is made clear to all that no natural convulsion of the earth threw the veil open, making the holy of holies as accessible as the outer court, which all might enter, and where all might worship.

**3. The veil was rent in twain.** — It did not fall to pieces, and was not torn to shreds. The rent was clean and straight, made by the invisible hand of the invisible God. Perhaps this exact division into two parts symbolized the separation of Christ's soul from his body in death. Perhaps it symbolized the throwing open of the great door between earth and heaven, as John saw in his vision, indicating the complete reconciliation of the fellowship between God and his people by the blood of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Revelation 4:1-2).

**4. The veil was rent from the top to the bottom.** — It was not rent from side to side, or from the bottom to the top, which might have suggested that it was simply worn out from usage. It was rent from the top to the bottom, showing that the power which rent it was from above, not from beneath. The rending of the veil was not of man, but of God. It was man that crucified the Lord of Glory, but "*it pleased the Lord to bruise him; He hath put him to grief.*" Beginning with the roof and ending with the floor, the rent was complete; for God in heaven had done it. From the roof to floor, there remained not one fragment of the old veil. So from heaven to earth, from the throne of God, down to the dwelling of man, there is not one remnant, not one particle of a barrier between redeemed sinners and the God of Glory. He who "*openeth and no man shutteth*" has, with his own hand, and in his own boundless mercy, love, and grace, thrown open to the chief of sinners the throne of grace, and bids us come in and draw near (Hebrews 4:16).

The rent veil declares that Christ is the end of the law. He finished and fulfilled it. He satisfied and completed it. Now, we have free and open access to the throne of God. The rending of the veil was done, as if the temple itself mourned for and testified abhorrence at the crucifixion of Christ. The temple rent, as it were, its garments at the death of its Lord. The veil was rent to show that the Lord, who had taken up his residence in the most holy place between the cherubim, over the mercy-seat in thick darkness, had now moved out and left the house desolate. The rending of the veil signified the rending of Christ's flesh, the breaking of his body for us, which was typified by the veil (Hebrews 10:20). The veil was rent to signify the clear, full revelation of God and his saving grace proclaimed in the Gospel, proclaiming the way into the holiest of all, into heaven itself, where Christ is, who entered by his own blood, as our Forerunner (Hebrews 10:9-22).

5. **The veil was rent in the presence of the Jewish priests.** — They were in the holy place, outside the veil, of course, officiating, lighting the lamps, or placing incense on the golden altar, or arranging the showbread on the golden table. When they saw the solemn rending of the veil, they must have been terrified. I can picture them covering their eyes lest they should see the hidden glories of that holy chamber they were forbidden to enter. Perhaps Isaiah's words rang in their ears, — *“Woe is me, for I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts”* (Isaiah 6:5).

6. **The veil was rent before their eyes to declare that Christ, our Passover, the true Passover, has opened the way for man to come to God.** — It is as though the Lord God himself declared, “It is okay for you to come in. It is no longer profanity for you to handle the holy things of the sanctuary, to gaze upon the sacrificial blood, approach the Mercy-Seat and sit down in the

presence of the glory of God.” Truly, the safest and the most blessed place for our needy souls is the Mercy-Seat, Christ Jesus. He bids us come into the holy place and handle him (1 John 1:1-2:1-2).

**7. The veil was rent at the time of the evening sacrifice.** — About three o’clock in the afternoon, as the sun began to set, the lamb was slain and laid upon the brazen altar. Just at the moment when its blood was shed, and the smoke arose from the fire that was consuming it, the veil was rent in twain. There was an unseen link between the altar and the veil, between the sacrifice and the rending, between the blood-shedding and the removal of the barrier. It was blood that had done the work. It was blood that had rent the veil and thrown open the door of access to God, the blood of “*the Lamb, without blemish, and without spot.*”

**8. The veil was rent precisely at the moment when the Son of God died on the cross.** — His death did it! His death opened God’s heaven for our souls. His death opened for us the way of life and brought us into life. It was from the cross that the power emanated which rent the veil. From that place of weakness and shame and agony came forth the omnipotent command, — “*Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors.*” Our Savior’s triumphant cry, “*It is finished*”, upon Golgotha, was the appointed signal; and the instantaneous response was the rending of the veil. The pierced hands of our accepted Sacrifice rent the veil separating God and man. It was the cross of Christ that rent the veil and opened the new and living way into the holiest of all.

**9. When the veil was rent, the cherubim embroidered on it were rent with it.** — Those cherubim symbolized the Church of God’s elect. Being embroidered into the veil, we see a picture of our

identification with Christ in his death. We were nailed with him to the cross. We were crucified with him. With him, we died, and were buried, and rose again. In that rent veil we have the temple-symbol of the apostle's doctrine concerning our union and oneness with Christ in life and death. — *“I am crucified with Christ.”* — *“Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”*

10. The rent veil declares that all the law is fulfilled, satisfied, and ended. — *“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.”* — *“There is therefore, now, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”*

The broken body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus opened the sinner's way into the holiest. These were the tokens of grace and of righteousness. The rending of the veil was not merely an act of God's power. And it was not merely an act of his grace. Righteousness had done it. Righteousness had rolled away the stone. Righteousness had burst the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. The barrier of separation has been righteously removed. We have a righteous as well as a gracious entrance into the holy place. God gives sinners a righteous as well as a gracious welcome at his throne!

That which the blood of bulls and goats could never do, Christ has done with his own precious blood! Thank God forever; his is better blood! It knocks but once, and the gate flies open. As soon as the blood touches the sword of fire, it is quenched. Not a moment is lost. The fulness of the time has come. God has unbarred the door! He has thrown open his Mercy-Seat to poor, needy sinners, and rushes to receive his banished ones!

The veil, then, has been rent in twain from the top to the bottom by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The way is open. The blood is sprinkled. The Mercy-Seat is accessible. And the voice of our Great High Priest, seated on that Mercy-Seat, bids us enter in, and to enter in boldly, without fear. — *“Having, therefore, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us,*

*through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith."*

Let us therefore enter in and find the mercy and grace we need in him. Entering in is our only security and our only joy. The only way we can enter in by Christ the Way is in the confident boldness of "*the full assurance of faith,*" trusting him alone as our all-sufficient, gloriously effectual Savior. Not to come with such boldness is unbelief. Not to come in the full assurance of faith is presumption. To draw near with an "*evil conscience*" is to declare our belief that the blood of the Lamb is not of itself enough to give the sinner a good conscience and a fearless access to the throne of grace.

Do you ask, "May I draw near, just as I am, by the blood of Christ?" Yes, you may! How else could you come? If ever you see the blood upon the Mercy-Seat, that will give you the boldness and full assurance of faith by which you may enter in. Do you see it? Has God the Holy Spirit given you eyes to see? Then come boldly in the full assurance of faith. The Triune God looks on the blood, and says, "Welcome". The Mercy-Seat is the place of pardon. No sinner who enters into the holy place, no sinner who comes to the throne of grace by the precious blood of Christ can ever be extracted from it.

The rent veil is liberty of access. The sprinkled blood is boldness, boldness for needy sinners. The rent veil has a voice. The blood is the voice. It speaks pardon, peace, salvation, and eternal life to sinners. "*Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart!*" Make haste and enter in!

# Chapter 139

## Our Savior's Death

Luke 23:44-49

“And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things” (Luke 23:44-49).

What great wonders attended the death of God's darling Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, upon the cursed tree!

### Two Great Miracles

In the passage before us we are told that two great miracles attended the sacrifice of our Savior at Calvary. *First*, God the Holy Spirit here calls our attention to the fact that there was “*a darkness over all the earth*” for three hours. — “*The sun was darkened and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.*” Our Savior, the true Passover, is here delivering his true Israel out of great darkness. Therefore, as the sun was darkened in Egypt for three days, it was darkened for three hours when the Lamb of

God was sacrificed for us.

Nothing could be more proper and fitting. When the great sacrifice for sin was offered, when the Son of God was dying, darkness covered the earth. This was done by the hand of God once before in the sight of all Israel. When the Lord God came to redeem Israel out of Egypt, he sent darkness upon that cursed land for three days. And when the law by which we are condemned was given on Mt. Sinai, God sent darkness upon the mountain of terror. Now, as the One who gave the law suffers all the penalty of the law for us, being made a curse for us, on Mt. Calvary the sun was darkened for three hours. Such a miracle, complete darkness at mid-day, was a miracle that should arrest our attention. It should compel us to stop and think.

During those three hours of darkness, our Redeemer was assaulted by all the powers of darkness with utmost might and malice. But he foiled them all and spoiled them all. He made an open show of them (as Roman conquerors used to do), triumphing over them on his cross, as on his chariot of state (Colossians 2:13-16), dragging his vanquished enemies and ours bound behind him (Ephesians 4:8; Psalm 68:17-20).

Next, we read that “*the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.*” That huge, thick curtain that hung between the holy place and the holy of holies was ripped from top to bottom. This was a miracle that must have shook the priests in the temple in their very souls. What an instructive miracle it is!

1. The law that once separated man and God has been completely fulfilled, satisfied, and terminated by the death of our Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 6:14-15; 7:4; 8:1-4; 10:4; Galatians 3:13, 24-26; 5:1)

Christ is the fulfillment of the law. Christ is the satisfaction of the law. Christ is the end, the finish, the termination of the law. We have no covenant with the law. We live under a covenant of grace. We have no commitment to the law. Our commitment is to Christ, who obeyed the law for us. We do nothing by constraint of the law. — “*The love of Christ constraineth us.*” We fear no

curse from the law. — *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. For it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.”*

2. By the rending of that veil, God and men are reconciled; and by the rending of that veil, everything that separates men from one another is destroyed (Ephesians 2:11-22).

3. Now, sinners like you and me have free access to God in all his glorious holiness (Romans 4:25-5:11; Hebrews 10:19-22).

Signs like these are part of the ways God speaks to arouse man’s attention and warn. He often performs miraculous things, forcing eternity bound sinners to open their eyes whether they want to or not, and to hear his voice though they try to be deaf to it. He has done so many times in the days that are past. He did so when he brought Israel out of Egypt. He did so when he gave the law at Sinai. And he did so, when by the sacrifice of his Son, he brought in this great day of grace. He will do so again when Christ comes in his glory (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 1:7). He says, *“Yet once more, I will shake not the earth only, but also the heavens”* (Hebrews 12:26; Isaiah 24:23).

## The Savior’s Cry

In verse 46 we hear our Savior’s cry to his Father and our Father, as he left this world, having finished everything he came into the world to accomplish. — *“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.”*

There was something mysterious about our Lord’s death, which made it unlike the death of any mere man. He who spoke those words is both God and man. His divine and human natures are inseparably united. Our Savior did not die as we shall. He did not die because he was compelled to die, or could not avoid dying. No! He voluntarily laid down his life as our Good Shepherd (John 10:15-18). He died as our sin-atonement Substitute.

And he set before us in his death the example we ought to follow in life, committing himself entirely to God (1 Peter 2:19-25; Philippians 3:7-10).

## The Centurion

*“Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man”* (v. 47). — I do not doubt at all that this centurion was converted by his dying Redeemer. His testimony in Matthew and Mark goes further: — *“Truly this was the Son of God.”* He Glorified God. He confessed that Christ was the Righteous Man. And he worshipped him as the Son of God.

*“And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned”* (v. 48). — They were terrified by their crime. They were repentant, pricked in their consciences; but theirs was *“a repentance to be repented of.”* So they returned to their homes under the wrath of God.

*“And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things”* (v. 49). — They stood afar off from danger, because their Surety had died. They stood, *“beholding these things,”* with wonder, as well as looking upon their dear suffering Lord, with aching hearts and flowing eyes, remembering him, remembering all he had taught them, remembering what they beheld on that great day of days. — REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED!

“Sons of peace redeemed by blood,  
Raise your songs to Zion’s God;  
Made from condemnation free,  
Grace triumphant sing with me.

Calvary’s wonders let us trace,  
Justice magnified in grace;  
Mark the purple streams, and say,  
Thus my sins were washed away.

Wrath Divine no more we dread,  
Vengeance smote our Surety's head;  
Legal claims are fully met,  
Jesus paid the dreadful debt.

Sin is lost beneath the flood,  
Drowned in the Redeemer's blood,  
Zion, oh! how blest art thou,  
Justified from all things now."

—*John Kent*

# Chapter 140

## Joseph of Arimathaea

Luke 23:50-56

“And, behold, [there was] a man named Joseph, a counsellor; [and he was] a good man, and a just: (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) [he was] of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. This [man] went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on. And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment” (Luke 23:50-56).

Some flowers only bloom at night. Joseph of Arimathaea was just such a flower. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell us the story of this man. Yet, there is no mention of him anywhere in the Word of God, until late in the evening of our Lord’s crucifixion; and there is no mention of him afterward. In so far as the record of Holy Scripture is concerned, he seems to have stepped onto the stage of history just after our Savior died, did just one thing, and then stepped off the stage into oblivion.

This rich man of Arimathaea was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, that mob of self-righteous Pharisees, that horrible Jewish religious court that had the Lord Jesus crucified. Yet, the Holy Spirit expressly tells us that he was “*a disciple of Jesus, but*

*secretly for fear of the Jews*” (John 19:38). Because he was a member of the Sanhedrin, because his fear of the Jews kept him from openly confessing the Lord Jesus, Joseph of Arimathaea is often overlooked, or looked upon with disdain.

We all naturally imagine that we would not have feared those men Joseph feared, that we would not keep our faith in Christ a secret thing, and that we would not remain a part of any church or religious body that had condemned the Lord Jesus and cried for his crucifixion. In fact, our proud, self-righteous hearts would quickly cast this man aside as a reprobate hypocrite, except for one thing. — God the Holy Spirit tells us (vv. 50-51) that Joseph of Arimathaea “*was a good man, and a just...who also himself waited for the kingdom of God.*” The word translated “*good*” in this particular place means “*ready.*” The word “*just*” means “*righteous, right, innocent, or faultless.*”

That sure messes things up. Doesn't it? It messes things up only if we are so foolish that we imagine that we know the heart of another and insist upon sitting ourselves up as judges before whom all the world must stand or fall!

Though no one around him, believers or unbelievers, church folks or street folks, no one imagined that Joseph was one of the Lord's disciples. “If he had,” as proud religious men say, “been put on trial for being a Christian, there would not have been enough evidence to convict him.” But Joseph of Arimathaea was the right man in the right place at the right time. He was one of God's saints, a man chosen for a specific service, brought forth to the light at exactly the right time. I do not excuse his fear of the Jews. I do not excuse his refusal to identify himself with his Lord. I do not justify his membership in the Sanhedrin. And I do not imagine that you would have done any better or any different than he did had you been in his place. — I am certain I would not have behaved better.

Having said all that, somehow, when he saw his Savior, whom he dearly loved, whom he trusted, the King for whom he had been looking, crucified upon the cursed tree, extraordinary courage nerved his spirit, and boldly he went to Pilate and begged the body of his Lord, that he might give him a proper burial.

When others were cowardly, Joseph was courageous. When others showed themselves lax, Joseph was loyal. When others denied their Savior, Joseph stepped forward to identify himself with his Redeemer and Lord. When others were reluctant, Joseph was ready.

Multitudes, like Joseph, have been emboldened by the cross of Christ to do what they would never have thought of doing otherwise. When night comes, the stars appear; and in the darkest night in the history of the world this star shined brightly.

## Seven Lessons

**1. Our great God rules and overrules all things for his own glory and the good of his elect.** — How could Isaiah's prophecy have been fulfilled, that Christ would make his grave with the rich in his death (Isaiah 53:9), except as it actually came to pass? He who was numbered with the transgressors and bare the sin of many made his grave with the rich.

When the Jewish leaders went to Pilate to have the Lord's legs broken and the body taken from the cross, they didn't say, "We need to bury the body," and did not ask that his body might be buried. The bodies of the crucified men were thrown into a common pit to be meat for buzzards and wild animals. The bodies were left in the open to rot, until the sun had bleached their bones. There was no thought of burying the crucified felon.

Even if the disciples had gotten up the nerve to have their Lord buried, they had no grave in Jerusalem. They were Galileans. They could not carry the Savior's body back to Galilee.

## Red Heifer

But, back in Numbers 19 there was a law given in Israel, one of the ceremonies required by God that the Jews never kept. It

involved the sacrifice of a red heifer. This red heifer offering was one of the most beautiful, intimate and intricate types of the offering of the Son of God for sinners given in the Old Testament; but it was never observed by anyone. This is what God required in Numbers 19.

“And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, This *is* the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein *is* no blemish, *and* upon which never came yoke: And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and *one* shall slay her before his face: And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times: And *one* shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn: And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast *it* into the midst of the burning of the heifer. Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even. And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even. And a man *that is* clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay *them* up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: *it is* a purification for sin. And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever.” (Numbers 19:1-10)

“*And a man that is clean shall gather.*” — A ceremonially clean man, one who has kept the ceremonial law of Moses, one who had no taint of ceremonial defilement on him, he “*shall gather up the ashes of the heifer.*” All that was left after the sacrifice was to be gathered by a clean man. He was to “*lay them*

*up without the camp in a clean place.”*

What was an unclean place? An unclean place under the law was anywhere a dead body had been. So it was essential that Christ be buried outside the camp. It was essential that he be buried in a clean place. Where could such a burying place be found? In steps this rich man from Arimathaea, Joseph, who had a sepulcher nearby, *“that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid”* (Luke 23:53).

If the Lord Jesus had been buried in a sepulcher where some other dead body had been laid, the ceremonial law would have been violated; but there was a tomb already prepared by God’s providence, where never man was laid. Joseph of Arimathaea had cut out the tomb for himself. It was to be his own grave. He had no idea, when he cut through the stone that prepared that burial place, that he was fulfilling the words of Isaiah chapter 53. — *“He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.”* But that is exactly what he did.

Here is something else. The law required that a clean man must do the job. You could not have found a cleaner man in all Jerusalem, as far as the ceremonial law of God was concerned, than Joseph of Arimathaea. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, one who rigidly observed the ceremonies of the law.

Still, one thing stood in the way. — Joseph was a terribly timid man. He was a secret disciple. But something happened. A miracle was wrought in his heart, and Joseph suddenly became a very bold man. He went in boldly and craved the body of the Lord Jesus.

Still, there is a problem. — Once a clean man touched a dead body he was unclean. That meant he could not keep the Passover. But that problem vanished in an instant. Joseph now understood that he did not need to keep the ceremonial Passover, because Christ his Passover had been sacrificed for him. The dead body he was handling was not his defilement, but his cleanness. The Lord Jesus had, by his shed blood, made atonement for his defilement (sin). The crucified Savior had made him clean; and he could not be made unclean again (Romans 4:8).

**2. The bodies of God's saints ought to be treated with honor and buried.** — As our Savior was buried as our Surety, brought to the dust of death (Psalm 22:15), that he might conquer death in his resurrection, we bury our brothers and sisters in Christ in hope and expectation of the resurrection. As our Lord Jesus was wrapped for his burial in a linen garment like a priest, we who are his shall be buried in the white linen, priestly garments of his righteousness, as a holy priesthood (Revelation 19:6-9).

**3. Death is not something God's people have any reason to fear.**

C. H. Spurgeon wrote, “That rock-hewn cell in the garden sanctified every part of God’s acre where saints lie buried. Instead of longing to live till Christ comes, as some do, we might rather pray to have fellowship with Jesus in his death and burial.”

**4. None of us has the ability to look upon the heart of another.** — The fact that we do not see grace in a person does not mean that grace is not there. — *“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations”* (Romans 14:1).

**5. Salvation is altogether by the grace of God.** — Our only righteousness is the righteousness he gives us in and by Christ.

The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us for justification. And the righteousness of Christ is imparted to us in regeneration, by the irresistible power and effectual grace of God the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 3:10-12; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 1 John 3:7-9). Just as the fallen, unrighteous nature of Adam was imparted to all men by natural birth, the holy, righteous nature of Christ is imparted to all God's elect in the new birth.

I am not saying that the believer is without sin. He is not. Sin is what we are by nature. Sin is mixed with all we do. Sin mars our best thoughts, blackens our best deeds, corrupts our best

words, and defiles our best aspirations. I am not saying that the old nature is changed in regeneration. It is not. Flesh is always flesh. It never improves. It never becomes spirit. It only corrupts, rots, and, thank God, in time dies. I am not saying that the believer's works can ever be accepted before God upon their own merit. They are not. We offer up our prayers and sacrifices to God, which are accepted by him only upon the merits of Christ's righteousness and blood atonement (1 Peter 2:5).

But I am saying that the person who is born of God is a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). He has a new nature, which is "*Christ in you the hope of glory.*" All who are born of God have in them that "*new man created in righteousness and true holiness*" (Ephesians 4:24). Those who do not have this imparted righteousness are no more born of God than those who do not have Christ's imputed righteousness are justified before God.

6. *God knows the best time to bring forth his servants to do the work for which he has ordained them, and the best means to secure it.* — When Joseph was needed, the Lord God had him ready for the service he was to perform.

7. *The sabbath was a day of rest in the Old Testament.* — Christ our Sabbath is our rest. We keep the sabbath by faith, ceasing from our own works and resting in our Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:9).

# Chapter 141

## The Tomb Wasn't Empty

Luke 24:1-12

“Now upon the first *day* of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain *others* with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: And as they were afraid, and bowed down *their* faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary *the mother* of James, and other *women that were* with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass” (Luke 24:1-12).

We often speak of “the empty tomb” as proof of our Savior’s resurrection from the dead, but that really is not accurate. The tomb really wasn’t empty. We who believe in the risen Christ

have entered into his rest, because he is resting at the right hand of the Father. We rest in Christ, the risen Redeemer, because his work is finished. His resurrection is the pledge that he has perfected forever them that are sanctified. He has finished all the salvation of his people, and we are complete in him. It is my hope that God the Holy Spirit will enable me to set before you some restful thoughts, as we make a pilgrimage to the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and see the place where the Lord lay.

## Once Died

The very first thing that must be remembered is this. — Christ Jesus once died. — *“For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God”* (Romans 6:10). So, as we gather around the place where the Lord Jesus slept *“with the rich in his death,”* seeing the stone rolled from the mouth of the tomb, we know he is not there. Yet, he assuredly was once there. — *“He was crucified, dead, and buried.”* He was as dead as the dead whose bodies are buried in the cemetery. Though he could see no corruption, though he could not be held by the bands of death beyond the predestined time, yet he was once dead. There was a time when there was no light in his eye, no sound in his ear, no thought in his mind, and no word in his mouth, because there was no pulse of life in his heart.

Christ died for our sins. He did not merely appear to be dead. He died unto sin once, because he was made sin for us. He was, therefore, buried in the sepulcher. A dead man is a fit occupant of the silent tomb. But, blessed be his name, he is not there now! He is risen from the dead. We look to the risen Christ as our only Savior and our only salvation, receiving the atonement from him (Romans 4:25-5:11).

We rejoice to know that *“Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”* And when he rose again the third day, our blessed Savior left some things in his tomb for us. What things did he leave? How are they to be used by us?

## Sweet Spices

First, the Lord Jesus left sweet spices in the tomb. When he arose, he did not take those costly spices in which his body was wrapped with him. He left them behind. Joseph had brought about one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, and the sweet aroma of those spices remained in the tomb. That tomb must have smelled like a perfume store, when Peter and John stepped into it.

What a blessed thought that is, when taken in a spiritual sense! Our Lord Jesus has filled the grave with a sweet fragrance. It no longer smells of corruption and foul decay, but we can sing

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“Why should we tremble to convey  
These bodies to the tomb?  
There the dear flesh of Jesus lay,  
And left a long perfume.

The graves of all the saints He blessed  
And softened every bed.  
Where should the dying members rest  
But with their dying Head?

Thence He arose, ascending high,  
And showed our feet the way.  
Up to the Lord we, too, shall fly  
At the great rising-day.”

That bed awaiting our bodies beneath the earth is now perfumed with costly spices and decked with sweet flowers. There the truest Friend we have once laid his holy head. The angel’s first word to the women who came to the tomb was, “*Fear not ye*” (Matthew 28:5). We should never draw back with fear from the grave. Our Lord was once there; and where he goes, no terror can remain. Let us, therefore, say with David, “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me*” (Psalms 23:4).

## Grave Clothes

Next, our Savior left his grave clothes behind him in the tomb. When Peter went into the sepulcher, he saw the grave clothes carefully folded by themselves, laying to one side. He did not leave behind him a moldy shroud, but, as Luke tells us in verse 12, “*linen clothes.*”

He left those grave clothes for us to look upon as tokens of his fellowship with us in our low estate, as reminders that as he has cast aside the garments of death so shall we. When he arose from his chamber, he left his bedclothes behind. And when we drop these bodies in death, as we ascend up to heaven, we will leave these garments of death behind (2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1-9; Psalms 27:13; 17:15; Isaiah 57:1-2). “*The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.*”

Look at it another way. When visting battlefields and museums of war, we see flags hung up in such places as the memorials of victory, memorials of defeated enemies and battles won. So it is in the tomb where the Savior vanquished death. There his grave clothes were laid as the trophies of his victory over death, and assurances to us that we have been made more than conquerors through him that hath loved us. — “*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*”

Take one more look at those linen grave clothes in the fragrant tomb. Do they not lay before your eye of faith as emblems of his righteousness, that righteousness by which he merits heavenly glory as our Surety, that righteousness he has made ours, by which we are made “*meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*”? (See Psalm 132:7-9, Revelation 14:4-5 and 19:6-9.)

## The Napkin

Then, John adds, Peter saw “*the napkin that was about his head*” carefully folded up and laid by itself ((John 20:6-7). I see that napkin in our Savior’s tomb still. It is the handkerchief with which the Lord God wipes every tear from our eyes. Let the widow and the orphan, the widower and the broken-hearted father, mourning brothers and sisters and friends take this handkerchief and wipe their tears away forever. — “*Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy*” (Jeremiah 31:16). “*Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead*” (Isaiah 26:19). And with this same handkerchief, he wipes away all other tears from our eyes (Revelation 7:17; 21:4).

## Angels

Our Lord Jesus left something else in his tomb. He left angels behind him and made the grave...

“A cell which angels use  
To come and go with heavenly news.”

Angels were not in the tomb before, but, at his resurrection, they descended. One rolled away the stone, and others sat where the Savior’s body once lay. I have never read that our Master has recalled the angels from the sepulchers of his saints. And we are assured that when his Lazaruses die, the angels of God carry their souls into the bosom of their Lord. And their bodies shall be watched by guardian spirits, as surely as Michael kept the body of Moses until the resurrection.

## A Way Out

Another thing was left behind in the tomb by our blessed

Redeemer. — A Way Out. He left an open passage from the tomb. The stone was rolled away. Death is, for God's elect, a prison without bars or doors. The open tomb tells me there is a Door open in Heaven. The risen Christ is the Way out of death for us. By his resurrection from the dead, we have been raised from spiritual death. God has "*quicken*ed us together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5).

"From darkest night to brilliant light,  
O praise His name, He lifted me!"

Our Savior's resurrection is the pledge of our resurrection. It is that by which we have been forever saved from the second death. We were raised from the dead with him representatively. We have been raised from the dead by him spiritually in the first resurrection, the new birth. And we shall be raised from the dead physically in the last day, when our bodies are raised in his likeness.

Our mighty Samson has pulled up the posts and carried away the gates of the grave with all their bars. The key is taken from the girdle of death and is held in the hand of the Prince of Life. As Peter, when he was visited by the angel, found that his chains fell off, while iron gates opened before him of their own accord, so shall the saints find ready escape at the resurrection morning. Yes, we shall sleep a while, each one in his resting-place, but we shall rise again in the morning, for the stone is rolled away. A mighty angel rolled away the great stone; and when he had done the deed, he sat down upon the stone. His garment was white as snow, and his face like lightning; and as he sat on the stone he seemed to say to death and hell, "Roll it back again if you can!" — That mighty Angel who rolled away the stone from the tomb for us is Christ himself!

## Light

Our risen Savior left one more thing behind in his tomb for us. Tombs are places of utter darkness. But our Lord Jesus left in his tomb the brilliant light of life and immortality.

God “hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (2 Timothy 1:9-11).

Our Lord Jesus Christ went into the tomb and illuminated it with his presence, “the lamp of his love is our guide through the gloom.” He has brought life and immortality to light by the gospel; and now in every cemetery there is a light which shall burn through the watches of earth’s night till the day break and the shadows flee away, and the resurrection morn shall dawn.

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming...But some *man* will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? *Thou* fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other *grain*: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh *is* not the same flesh: but *there is* one *kind of* flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, *and* another of birds. *There are* also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another. *There is* one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for *one* star differeth from *another* star in glory. So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body;

it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam *was made* a quickening spirit. Howbeit that *was* not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man *is* of the earth, earthy: the second man *is* the Lord from heaven. As *is* the earthy, such *are* they also that are earthy: and as *is* the heavenly, such *are* they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15: 20-23, 35-58).

## Chapter 142

“He opened to us the Scriptures.”

Luke 24:13-35)

“And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem *about* threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed *together* and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications *are* these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found *it* even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to

believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things *were done* in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread” (Luke 24:13-35).

That which is here revealed is so precious, so sweet, so heavenly that it hardly needs explanation. Indeed, it cannot be explained to any who have not experienced it for themselves. As they walked together, our Lord Jesus opened the Scriptures to these two disciples. — “Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” Robert Hawker, commenting on those words, wrote, “Hence we are taught, as plain as words can make it, that the whole body of Scripture is concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Pearl of great price in this Field of his Divine Revelation. As he drew near these two disciples in the way, may he draw near to us every time we open the Book of God. As he opened to them the Scriptures, may he open the Scriptures to us by his Spirit. As his presence and his doctrine caused their hearts to burn within them, O may he cause our hearts to burn within us when we read and study the Sacred Volume.

The fact is, we have read the Bible with no profit to our souls and no understanding of its message, until we realize that the message of Holy Scripture is the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose of the Bible is the revelation of Christ.

I fully agree with Martin Luther, who wrote, “There is not a word in the Bible which can be understood without reference to the cross...As we go to the cradle only in order to find the baby, so we go to the Scriptures only to find Christ.”

Robert Murray M’Cheyne, who lived long before anyone dreamed of electric lights, said to his congregation at Christ’s Church in Dundee, Scotland, “When you are reading a book in a dark room, and find it difficult, you take it to a window to get more light. So take your Bible to Christ.”

Christ is the scope of Scripture, the sum and substance of divine Revelation. Take Christ out of this Book and all that is left is processed wood, with gilded edges, wrapped in leather covers.

## *One Message*

The one thing I want you to see in this study is this fact. — The Bible is a Book about the Lord Jesus Christ. How I wish I could get every man who claims to be a preacher to see this! With regard to the Book of God, Christ is “the key of knowledge.” Without the key, men can never unlock the Chest and discover its riches. — They just fumble. The Bible is not a book about science, but the Book about Christ. This is not a book about morality, but the Book about Christ. This is not a book about history, politics, philosophy, or law. It is not even a book about prophecy, church dogma, or theology. This is a HIM-BOOK. It is all about HIM, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not enough just to preach the Book, we are sent of God to preach the message of the Book, and the message of this Book is Jesus Christ and him crucified. There is not a page in this Book that does not speak of Christ, not a page!

The Son of God tells us plainly that he is the message and theme of Holy Scripture, that he is the living Word of whom the

written Word speaks. He said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). — “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself...And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:27, 44-47).

The Apostle Paul shows us that the preaching of Christ is synonymous with preaching all the counsel of God, for Christ is all the counsel of God. In Acts 20:26-27 he said, to the Ephesian elders, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. (27) For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” In 1 Corinthians 2:2 he wrote, to the Church at Corinth, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” In both places, he is telling us the same thing. Christ and him crucified, is all the counsel of God, for all that God almighty has purposed, decreed, revealed and given to the sons of Adam is in Jesus Christ and him crucified. The Bible, the Word of God is a Book with one message, and that one message is redemption, righteousness, and eternal life in Christ.

## The Old Testament Prophecies

The Old Testament Scriptures speak of Christ, point us to Christ, and call us to faith in Christ. All the law, the prophets, and the psalms speak of our Redeemer. All the Old Testament declares, “The Redeemer is coming.”

From the moment that God announced in the Garden of Eden that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15), Christ was the central fact and figure of Old

Testament prophecy. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, and all the prophets spoke of him. Here are a few of the many prophetic statements that pointed directly to the coming of Christ, his glorious Person, and his redemptive work (Genesis 22:13-14; 49:10; Deuteronomy 18:15-18; Psalms 2:7-8; 45:6-7; 110:3; Proverbs 8:22-23; Song of Songs 1:2-4; Isaiah 53:8-11; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 12:10; Malachi 3:1). Job spoke of Christ as his Redeemer, whom he expected to see in his flesh in resurrection glory. Enoch prophesied of Christ's glorious second advent, of his coming to the earth in the last day with ten thousands of his saints.

## The Old Testament Types

In addition to the direct prophecies about the coming of Christ, God gave numerous types and pictures to foreshadow his coming. The types of Christ and his redemptive works are so numerous that I cannot begin to name them. But let me mention just a few. They may be divided into three different categories.

**1. Typical People** — Adam (Romans 5:14), Noah (Hebrews 11:7), Melchisedec (Hebrews 7:1-3), Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18), Aaron (Hebrews 5:1-5), Joshua (Hebrews 4:1-9), Boaz (Ruth 2:1; 3:18), David (Acts 2:25-36), Solomon (1 Kings. 10:1-24).

**2. Typical Things** — Noah's Ark (Genesis 6), The Ram Caught in a Thicket (Genesis 22:8-13), Jacob's Ladder (John 1:51), The Brazen Serpent (John 3:14-16), The Paschal Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), The Scapegoat (Leviticus 16:21), The Manna (John 6:32-33), The Smitten Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4), The Altar of Sacrifice (Hebrews 13:10), The Mercy-Seat (1 John 2:1-2).

**3. Typical Places** — The Tabernacle (John 1:14), The Temple (John 2:18-20), The Cities of Refuge (Hebrews 6:18).

The lists could be greatly expanded.<sup>26</sup> I have not even

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26 Peter in Acts 2, Stephen in Acts 7, and Paul in Acts 13 delivered sermons that summarized the entire history of the Old Testament. And the subject of each of their sermons was the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ and him crucified is the theme of Holy Scripture! "To him give all the prophets witness!" And to him give all the apostles witness. Every book of the Bible speaks of Christ. Let me show you just one thing revealed about Christ in each of the 66 books of Holy Scripture. Christ is the theme of every text, the subject of every page, and the message of every subject set forth in Holy Scripture. But space will permit me to show you just one thing revealing Christ in every book of the Bible.

In Genesis he is the Seed of the Woman. In Exodus he is the Paschal Lamb. In Leviticus he is the Atonement for Sin. In Numbers he is the Brazen Serpent. In Deuteronomy he is the City of Refuge. In Joshua he is Rahab's Scarlet Cord. In Judges he is the Angel of the Lord. In Ruth he is our Kinsman Redeemer. In 1 Samuel he is the Slayer of our Enemies. In 2 Samuel he is the Gracious King. In 1 Kings he is the Builder of His Temple. In 2 Kings he is the Great Prophet. In 1 Chronicles he is the Ark of Blessing. In 2 Chronicles he is the Defender Of His People. In Ezra he is the Restorer of His People. In Nehemiah he is the Rememberer of His People. In Esther he is the Preserver of His People. In Job he is the Daysman. In Psalm he is the Good Shepherd. In Proverbs he is the Wisdom of God. In Ecclesiastes he is the Teacher of Wisdom. In Solomon's Song he is the Beloved of His Church. In Isaiah he is the Substitute for Sinners. In Jeremiah he is the Lord our Righteousness. In Lamentations he is the Lord our Portion. In Ezekiel he is the Glory of the Lord. In Daniel he is the Messiah the Prince. In Hosea he is God my Husband. In Joel he is the Hope of His People. In Amos he is the Sifter of His People. In Obadiah he is the Searcher of Hearts. In Jonah he is the Sovereign Deliverer. In Micah he is Bethlehem's Infant. In Nahum he is the Great One. In Habakkuk he is the Faithful One. In Zephaniah he is the Mighty One. In Haggai he is the Desire of All Nations. In Zechariah he is the Fountain Opened for Sinners. In Malachi he is the Sun of Righteousness. In Matthew he is the Son of David. In Mark he is the Son of Man. In Luke he is the Son of God. In John he is the Lamb of God. In Acts he is the Ascended Lord. In Romans he is the Just God our Savior. In 1 Corinthians he is the Power of God. In 2 Corinthians he is the Reconciler. In Galatians he is the End of the Law. In Ephesians he is the Effectual Savior. In Philippians he is the Joy of Saints. In Colossians he is the Pre-eminent One. In 1 Thessalonians he is the Hope of Salvation. In 2 Thessalonians he is the Coming Lord. In 1 Timothy he is the Preacher's Doctrine. In 2 Timothy he is the Eternal Surety. In Titus he is the Grace of God. In Philemon he is the Intercessor. In Hebrews he is the Fulfillment of the Law. In James he is the Giver of Grace. In 1 Peter he is the Effectual Redeemer. In 2 Peter he is the Longsuffering Lord. In 1 John he is the Propitiation for Our Sins. In 2 John he is the Doctrine of God. In 3 John he is

mentioned all the instituted, ceremonial types, the sabbath days, and the many other instituted types of the Old Testament, all of which pointed to the Person and work of Christ as our Mediator. — “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ” (Colossians 2:16-17).

## The New Testament

The doctrine and message of the entire New Testament is the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not have two Bibles, the Old and the New. We have one Bible. God’s Word is one, with two distinct parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed. The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. But the message in both the Old and the New is the same. — The message is Christ.

The four Gospels give us four views of Christ. Matthew presents him as the promised King. Mark presents him as the Servant of God. Luke presents him as the Son of Man. John presents him as the Son of God. The four gospels tell us that the Redeemer has come.

The Book of Acts tells us that the Redeemer is enthroned. The Book of Acts demonstrates that our Lord Jesus Christ was the singular subject of preaching in the earliest days of Christianity. — The words “preach,” “preached,” and “preaching” are used thirty-seven times in the Book of Acts. It is not insignificant that every time they are used the subject

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the Truth of God. In Jude he is Our Security. In Revelation he is the Fulness of God

If we would understand, profit from and rightly use the Word of God, we must understand everything written in the Sacred Volume as it relates to the glorious Person and saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Never be satisfied with your understanding of any text in the Book of God until in it you have “found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus,” the Christ, the Son of God. The Book of God is a Book about Him!

preached was Jesus Christ and the resurrection! If the Book of Acts is to be taken for our standard, it must be concluded that unless Christ has been preached no preaching has been done. That man who pretends to be a preacher but does not preach Christ and him crucified mocks the people who hear him, and rather than serving their souls he destroys them.

The Epistles reveal and explain the mysteries of Christ and his gospel, proclaiming the Redeemer's doctrine: Ruin by the Fall, Redemption by the Blood, and Regeneration by the Holy Spirit, showing us the universality of God's mercy, love, and grace in Christ for chosen sinners out of every nation, kindred, tribe, and tongue. The Book of Revelation is a declaration of the sure triumph of Christ and his church by the gospel. The Book of Revelation tells us that the Redeemer is coming again. — "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they *also* which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him" (Revelation 1:7).

"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, *be* unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four *and* twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever" (Revelation 5:9-14).

"Behold the glories of the Lamb

Amidst His Father's throne.  
Prepare new honors for His Name,  
And songs before unknown.

Let elders worship at His feet,  
The church adore around,  
With vials full of odors sweet,  
And harps of sweeter sound.

Those are the prayers of the saints,  
And these the hymns they raise;  
Jesus is kind to our complaints,  
He loves to hear our praise.

E-eternal Father, who shall look  
Into Thy secret will?  
Who but the Son should take the Book  
And o-pen every seal?

He shall fulfill Thy great decrees,  
The Son deserves it well;  
Lo, in His hand the sovereign keys  
Of heaven, and death, and hell!

Now to the Lamb that once was slain  
Be endless blessings paid;  
Salvation, glory, joy remain  
Forever on Thy head.

Thou hast redeemed our souls with blood,  
Hast set the prisoner free;  
Hast made us kings and priests to God,  
And we shall reign with Thee.

The worlds of nature and of grace  
Are put beneath Thy power;  
Then short-en these delaying days,  
And bring the promised hour.”

“And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Revelation 19:6).

The whole message of the Bible is Jesus Christ and him crucified. Christ is the living Word of whom the written Word speaks. If we could squeeze the whole Volume of Inspiration down to its very essence and substance, we would find Christ, only Christ, and nothing but Christ. Our Lord said, concerning the whole Volume of the Holy Scriptures, “They testify of me” (John 5:39). The purpose of the Holy Spirit in moving men to write the Scriptures was to reveal Christ. That is the only purpose for which the Inspired Volume was given (John 16:14). To use the Scriptures for any other purpose is to misuse and abuse them.

### *The Ordinances of the Gospel*

The only two ordinances of worship prescribed in the New Testament are designed to focus our hearts upon Christ. Baptism is a symbolic burial and resurrection with him (Romans 6:3-6). The Lord’s Supper is a symbolic remembrance of Christ and his great work of redemption as our Substitute (1 Corinthians 11:24-26).

Christ is the message of the Book of God, in the Old Testament prophecies, in the Old Testament types, in the New Testament, and in the ordinances of divine worship. In the Book of God we read about Christ. In believer’s baptism we confess Christ. In the Lord’s Supper we remember Christ.

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

I cannot find better words to express what I so earnestly want you to see than these, which were spoken by C. H. Spurgeon to his congregation in London many years ago...

“Brethren, we should always read Scripture in this light; we should consider the Word of God to be as a mirror into which Christ looks down from heaven; and, then, we looking into it see his face reflected as in a glass — darkly, it is true, but still in such a way as to be a blessed preparation for seeing him as we shall see him face to face. This Volume contains Jesus Christ's letters to us, perfumed by love. These pages are the garments of our King and they all smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. Scripture is the golden chariot in which Jesus rides, and it is paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem. The Scriptures are the swaddling bands of the holy child, Jesus; unroll them, and you find your Savior.”

When you read the Word of God, look for Christ. When you study the Word of God, study Christ. When you talk about the Word of God, talk of Christ. When you live by the Word of God, live Christ. And when you preach the Word of God, preach Christ.

## Preach Christ

The American Puritan, Cotton Mather, instructed his students with these wise and needful words of counsel — “Among all the subjects with which you feed the people of God, I beseech you, let not the true Bread of Life be forgotten; but exhibit as much as you can of the glorious Christ unto them; yea, let the motto upon your whole ministry be, ‘Christ is all!’”

What a blessing it would be if every man who claims to speak for God, who claims to be a gospel preacher, would heed those words! How blessed the church of God would be if those who fill her pulpits were determined to preach and teach nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified!

That was Paul’s determination (1 Corinthians 2:2). It ought to be every preacher’s determination. Any man who is sent of God to preach is sent of God to preach Christ crucified, always, in all places, in all his fullness (1 Corinthians 1:17-25). Christ crucified is “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

He is the singular subject of Holy Scripture. He is the sum and essence of all true doctrine. He is the life of all gospel ordinances. He is the secret ingredient of all true worship. He is the Mercy-seat in whom God meets with men. He is the motive of all godliness, obedience, service, and devotion. He is the reward of heavenly glory. Jesus Christ is our God. Jesus Christ is our Savior. And Jesus Christ is salvation. He is the Way to heaven; and he is Heaven. He is the Revealer of truth, and he is Truth. He is the Giver of Life; and he is Life. — “Christ is all!”

When we talk about *divine sovereignty*, we are declaring that Jesus Christ is Lord. When we proclaim God’s glorious work of *predestination*, we are showing how that sinners have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ. God’s *election* is his choice of some to everlasting salvation in Christ and for Christ’s sake. *Total depravity*, a thoroughly biblical doctrine, is God’s revelation of our need of Christ. *Limited atonement* is the biblical assurance of effectual redemption and grace by Christ, the declaration that all for whom Christ died shall be saved. *Irresistible grace*, or effectual calling, is the almighty, irresistible revelation of Christ in the soul by the Holy Spirit, which causes the chosen to come to him. *Regeneration* is the implanting of Christ in us. *Justification* is the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to all his redeemed. *Faith* is trusting Christ. *Sanctification* is Christ being formed in us, begun in regeneration and consummated in glorification. *Perseverance* is Christ holding our hearts by grace and keeping us in life and faith. *Baptism* is the believer’s public confession of faith in Christ. Being symbolically buried in the watery grave and raised with him, we confess our faith in his finished work of redemption as our Substitute. *The Lord’s Supper* is our blessed remembrance of Christ. *Eternal life* is knowing Christ. *Heaven* is being with Christ and like Christ perfectly and forever. *Preaching* is telling people about Christ. Anything else is not preaching. Call it what you may; but it is not preaching!

# Chapter 143

## The Necessity

### Luke 24:26

“Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory” (Luke 24:26).

Our Lord Jesus is walking along the Emmaus Road, talking to two of his disciples, who were terribly perplexed by the fact that he had been delivered by the chief priests unto Pilate, condemned and crucified. The risen Redeemer was standing before them, and they said, “*We had trusted.*” (How sad! Had they given up their trust? Were they now saying, “We trust him no more”?) — “*We had trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.*” In verses 25 and 26 our Savior answers them with a word of stern reproof and blessed instruction.

Here is his word of reproof. — “*Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken*” (v. 25). The most foolish, God dishonoring thing in this world is unbelief. And when that unbelief is found in his own, it is even more foolish and more God dishonoring! That is our Savior’s word of stern reproof. Let us lay it to heart.

But I want to call your attention to the word of instruction found in verse 26. It is cast in the form of a two part question — “*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?*” Our Lord Jesus here asserts again what he had so often told them, that there was an imperative, an absolute necessity that he suffer all that he suffered in Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha. And he tells them that one aspect of that necessity was the fact that he could never have entered into his glory had he not suffered all those things as our Surety,

Substitute, and Savior.

## God's Greatest Work

Without question, the most wondrous of all God's works is the work of redemption. When we attempt to contemplate what that work involved, we are lost in astonishment. When we think of the unutterable depths of shame and sorrow into which the Lord of glory entered to save us, we are awed and staggered.

“That the eternal Son of God should lay aside the robes of His ineffable glory and take upon Him the form of a servant, that the Ruler of heaven and earth should be *'made under the law'* (Galatians 4:4), that the Creator of the universe should tabernacle in this world and *'have not where to lay His head'* (Matt. 8:20), is something which no finite mind can comprehend; but where carnal reason fails us, God-given faith believes and worships.” (A. W. Pink)

As we trace the path of our Savior from the throne of life to the tomb of death and behold him who was rich, for our sakes, becoming poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich, we cannot fathom the depths of the wonders before us. We know that every step in the path of our Redeemer's humiliation was ordained in the eternal purpose of God. Yet, it was a path of immeasurable sorrow, unutterable anguish, ceaseless ignominy, bitter hatred, and relentless persecution that, at last, brought the Beloved Son of God, the Darling of heaven, to suffer the painful, shameful death of the cross. Who could ever have imagined such things as these?

Standing at the foot of the cross, as I behold the Holy One nailed to the cursed tree, covered with his own blood and the spit of an enraged mob, made sin, forsaken, and cursed of God his Father, yet, realizing that this is the work of God's own hand, I am lost in astonishment. I am filled with reverence and awe (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13).

“Yonder, amazing sight, I see! —

The incarnate Son of God  
Expiring on the cursed tree,  
And weltering in His blood.

Behold, a purple torrent run  
Down from his hands and head,  
The crimson tide puts out the sun;  
His groans awake the dead.

The trembling earth, the darkened sky,  
Proclaim the truth aloud;  
And with the amazed centurion, cry,  
‘This is the Son of God!’”

## A Question

Awed as I am with reverence for my crucified Lord, still there is a question that I cannot suppress, a question that reason and sound judgment cannot fail to ask. The question is, Why? Why did the Son of God suffer such a death? Why did God so torment his beloved Son and kill him in such an horribly ignominious way?

Was it to save my soul? I know that he did so that I might live. He suffered, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring me to God. But was there no other way for the omnipotent God to save me? — Was all this done to demonstrate the greatness of God’s love to me? Indeed it was (Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10).

“Jesus, who left His throne on high,  
Left the bright realms of bliss,  
And came to earth to bleed and die,  
Was ever love like this?”

But, surely, God could have revealed his love to me in some other way. Why did he slay his Son? What necessity was there for the Son of God to suffer and die upon the cursed tree?

Only one answer can be found to that question. — The justice

of God had to be satisfied. There was no necessity for God to save anyone. Salvation is altogether the free gift of his grace. But, having determined to save his elect from the ruins of fallen humanity, the only way God could save his people and forgive their sins was by the death of Christ. — “*Without shedding of blood is no remission*” (Hebrews 9:22). The justice of God had to be satisfied in order for God to save his people; and the only thing that could ever satisfy the justice of God is the blood of Christ.

I want to show you from the Word of God both the necessity and the blessedness of Christ’s satisfaction of divine justice by his death on the cross. This is a doctrine of utmost importance. It is the glory of the gospel and the revelation of the glory of our God. It is the satisfaction of divine justice by the death of Christ that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. Take the cross out of Christianity, take away the satisfaction of Christ by his death upon the cross, and Christianity is of no more value and benefit to the souls of men than Judaism, Islam, or Hinduism. It is of paramount importance, because without satisfaction for sin, there could be no salvation from it.

Among the countless damnable heresies that are embraced and taught by men, none is more common and none so destructive to the souls of men as the denial of Christ’s satisfaction (Hebrews 10:26-29).<sup>27</sup>

## Hebrews 2:9-10

Perhaps Hebrews 2:9-10 states the necessity of Christ’s satisfaction for sin more clearly than any other single text.

We see that he is Jesus, our Savior, the Christ of God. We see in him the fulness of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9), the fulness of grace (John 1:14; Colossians 1:19), and the fulness of redemption (Ephesians 1:7). We see him as Christ, our Redeemer, the Son of

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27 “Unholy” in Hebrews 10:29 means “common”. Those who make the blood of Christ a common thing, without efficacy, without merit, are without hope! There is no other sacrifice for sin.

God, the Son of Man, the Lord our Righteousness. We see him as our all (1 Corinthians 1:31). Do you see him? If you do, flesh and blood has not revealed him to you, but our Father in heaven.

***“Who was made a little lower than the angels”*** — He who made the angels was made a little lower than the angels. He was made of the seed of woman, made to be a man, *“made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law”* (Galatians 4:4-5). This is the reason for the incarnation. This is why Christ was made a little lower than the angels...

***“For the suffering of death”*** — The Son of God came into this world for the purpose of suffering death. He did not come to be an earthly monarch in Jerusalem. He did not come to establish a new religion. He did not come to be a reformer, or a mere example of morality and virtue. Christ, the Son of God, became a man so that he might die in the place of men and redeem them. He came here to die, because there was no other way for his people to be saved and live. We see this too, since he suffered and died in the place of his people, the Lord Jesus Christ is now...

***“Crowned with glory and honor”*** (Philippians 2:8-11). Christ is exalted. That Man who died for us at Calvary is now crowned with glory, given all honor, as the Lord of all. The God-man, who died for us, now rules the world to save those people for whom he died (John 17:2; Romans 14:9).

Now, look at the next line. Christ *“was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”* — This statement, like all others, must be interpreted within its context and in the light of the entire Word of God. Is this a declaration that Christ died even for those for whom he refused to pray (John 17:9), for those who are not his sheep (John 10:11), for those who are vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (Romans 9:22), for those from whom he has hidden both his works and his grace (Matthew 11:20-25)? Of course not! Does this statement mean that Christ died for those who suffer the wrath of God in hell? No! That would be a declaration that there are some for whom Christ shed his blood in vain and would be a denial of the efficacy of his atonement.

What, then, is the meaning of this statement? *“That he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”*

Christ died not merely as good example, or merely for the good of men, but as the divine Surety, in the room and place of men. However, the word “*man*” was added by our translators with no apparent reason, except to make the sentence read more easily. In the Greek text there is no word in this verse that should be translated “*man*.” The sentence literally should be translated, *“That he by the grace of God should taste death for every,”* or *“for all,”* or *“for every one.”* And the context makes it crystal clear that the Apostle was speaking of specific men. Our Lord Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every one of the sons he would bring to glory (v. 10), for every one of the brethren he is not ashamed to own (v. 11), for every member of the church, in the midst of which he will sing praise (v. 12), for every one of the children God the Father had given him to save, for whose sake he assumed flesh and blood (v. 13), for every one of Abraham’s seed, God’s elect, whom he took hold of to save (v. 16).

Why was the Son of God made so humble as to suffer and die for his people? What necessity was there for his humiliation and death in the room and stead of his people? Read verse 10...

*“For it became him.”* — It was necessary, if God would save sinners and bring them to glory, that the Son of God must suffer in their room and stead all that the law and justice of God could demand. The Scriptures plainly declare that there was a necessity for the death of Christ (Matthew 16:21; John 3:14). It was necessitated by the decree of God (Acts 2:23), Christ’s covenant engagements as our Surety (John 10:17-18), the prophecies of the Old Testament (Matthew 26:54), and the election of grace. God did not have to save anyone; but since he has chosen to save some, the only way he could save them was by the satisfaction of justice, through the sacrifice of his own dear Son.

When Paul says, *“it became him,”* that it was necessary for God to slay his Son to save his people, lest we begin to think that this implies some weakness in God, he immediately describes our God with these words — *“for whom are all things and by whom*

***are all things.***” Here the Lord God is described as that One who is both the ultimate end and first cause of all things (Romans 11:36). All things are for him. He made all things for himself, for the glorifying of all the perfections of his nature (Proverbs 16:4; 2 Corinthians 5:18). And all things are by him. All things in nature, all things in providence, all things in redemption, and all things in grace are the work of our God.

I repeat myself deliberately, — God did not have to save anyone; but since he has chosen to save some, the only way he could save them was by the satisfaction of justice through the sacrifice of his own dear Son.

***“In bringing many sons unto glory.”*** — This is an intimation of God’s gracious designs toward his elect. Those whom Christ came to save are many, and they were already the sons of God by eternal adoption and divine predestination long before Christ came to redeem them (Galatians 4:4-6). In the covenant of grace our God declared, *“I will be their Father, and they shall be my sons and daughters.”* We were chosen to be the children of God from eternity. We were given power and authority to become the sons of God, and given the nature of God’s sons in regeneration (John 1:12-13). And we were openly and manifestly declared to be the sons of God when we believed by faith in Christ. Our faith in Christ does not make us God’s sons. Adoption did that. Faith receives the adoption of sons and looks upon God through Christ as our Father (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15-16).

The sons of God are many, a great multitude which no man can number, ten thousand times ten thousand. — The many chosen of God. — The many for whom Christ gave his life a ransom. — The many for whom his blood was shed for the remission of sins. — The many made righteous by his obedience. — The many for whom many mansions are prepared in the Father’s house.

“God has chosen them *‘through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth’*, to the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ! Christ died for them, and by means of his death, they receive the promise of eternal inheritance, and the inheritance itself. God calls them by

his grace to eternal glory, and makes them *'meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'*" (John Gill)

The Person by whom God's elect are brought to glory is Christ, "***the Captain of their salvation.***" He is called "***the Captain***" of our salvation because he is the One in charge of it, the One responsible for it, the One whose arm alone has accomplished it.

As the Captain of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ was "***made perfect through sufferings.***" That is to say, the way, the means by which our great Savior saved us and perfected, or completed his work as the Captain of our salvation was by his perfect sufferings and death as our Substitute. Apart from his sufferings for the satisfaction of justice there could have been no salvation. — "*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered: And being made perfect, he became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him*" (Hebrews 5:8-9).

It was necessary for Christ to suffer and die on the cross under the wrath of God to save his people. He did not have to save us. But if he saved us he could not save in any other way. Justice demanded it (Proverbs 16:6; 17:15; Romans 3:24-26; 1 Peter 3:18).

This is what the Spirit of God teaches us in Hebrews 2:9-10: Since it was the design, purpose, and pleasure of the Almighty to bring some of the sons of men into eternal glory and happiness as the sons of God by Christ, it was necessary for Christ, the Son of God, to suffer all that the law and justice of God required for the punishment of sin, dying under the wrath of God as our Substitute.

I am not saying that the satisfaction of Christ procures the love of God for us. It does not. The death of Christ is the fruit of God's love, not the cause of it. But I am saying, it is the death of Christ and the satisfaction of justice by his death that opens the way into the embraces of God's arms. We could never have been reconciled to God without the shedding of Christ's blood.

“Let me observe to you something relating to experience, which you would do well to lay up in your minds. It may be of use to you hereafter, when you may be tempted to doubt of your interest in Christ’s satisfaction. Have you any reason to believe that you have, at any time, had communion with God, in private or in public, in your closet, or in the family, or in the house of God, under any ordinance, either the ministry of the Word, or prayer, or the Supper of the Lord? Then you may be assured Christ has made satisfaction for you; or you would never have enjoyed such communion” (John Gill).

## Six Statements

Here are six statements that simply cannot be refuted and must not be ignored.

1. All men and women by nature, since the fall of our father Adam, are sinners, alienated from God.

*“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). — As sinners, we are alienated from the life of God and have become enemies unto God. The wages of our sin and enmity to God is death.

Every transgression must receive its just recompense of reward (Hebrews 2:2). All sin must be punished, either in the sinner or in the sinner’s Substitute. The law, being broken, accuses of sin, condemns the sinner, and demands death. Unless satisfaction is made, the sentence of the law must be executed. The sanction of the law is death. It can never be abrogated, changed, altered, or abated. God will never relax his justice! *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die!”* (Ezekiel 18:2). But...

2. It is the will of God to save sinners. — *“He delighteth in mercy!”*

God has decreed the salvation of some. Christ came to save some. There are some people in this world who must be saved, because it is the will of God to save them; and God’s will cannot be frustrated (John 10:16). Every chosen sinner (2 Thessalonians

2:13-14), every predestined son (Romans 8:29-30), every heir of the covenant (Ephesians 1:3-7), and every child of Adam whose name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life from the foundation of the world must be saved (Revelation 13:8). There is no possibility that even one of God's elect will perish! However...

3. It is impossible for a holy and just God to save any sinner apart from the satisfaction of justice (Hebrews 9:22).

God declares, "*I will by no means clear the guilty*" (Exodus 34:7). I know that God is omnipotent, almighty, and sovereign. He does what he will! Nobody on this earth declares that glorious truth more fully, more frequently, or more forcibly than I do. But God cannot do that which is contrary to his nature and character. We do not rob God of his sovereignty when we repeat the declaration of Scripture and say, "*God cannot lie.*" He who is the Truth cannot lie. Neither do we rob God of his sovereignty when we assert this truth of Holy Scripture: — God cannot forgive sin without the satisfaction of justice. The just, holy, and true God must punish sin.

4. The only way the justice of God could ever be satisfied is by the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ (Job 34:23; Romans 3:24-26).

God could not die, and man could not satisfy; but the God-man both died and satisfied. Two facts demonstrate clearly that there was no other way for justice to be satisfied. Only the death of Christ upon the cross could do it. The love of God the Father for his Son proves it. Would God almighty slay his darling Son, if there were any other way to save his people consistent with his justice? And the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane proves it (Matthew 26:39). If the salvation of his people could be accomplished by any means other than his death upon the cross, would not God the Father have granted his tormented Son the desire of his soul?

What can justice satisfy?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

What can God's law magnify?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!  
Oh, precious is the flow,  
That makes me white as snow!  
No other fount I know,  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

5. It is impossible for God in his holiness to punish any sinner for whose sins justice has been satisfied by the blood of Christ (Isaiah 53:11 Romans 8:1-4). The law has no claim upon an executed felon.

“Payment God cannot twice demand,  
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,  
And then again at mine!”

6. Every sinner who trusts the Lord Jesus Christ has been chosen, redeemed, and called, and must be forever saved!

## Christ's Glory

There is something else suggested in Luke 24:26. Christ could not have entered into his glory except by his suffering and death as our Substitute, by which justice was satisfied, righteousness was brought in, his work was finished, and the people he came to save were saved. His question reads, “*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?*” We are convinced by Holy Spirit conviction of righteousness, because he has ascended to the Father (John 16:11; Romans 14:9; Philippians 2:8-11).

What a horrible evil sin is. Nothing but the blood of Christ could make satisfaction for it. God almighty will punish sin. The death of Christ as the sinner's Substitute demonstrates the strictness of God's holy law. Yet, there is a way open for sinners to come to God. Christ is the Way. He has made satisfaction for sin. If you trust him, if you come to God by faith in him, he made satisfaction for your sin.

Let us ever admire and adore the perfections of our God (Psalm 85:10-11). Admire his love. Adore his mercy. Rejoice in his grace. Stand in awe of his wisdom, holiness, justice, and truth. All shine forth gloriously in the satisfaction of Christ. — *“For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”* Divine wisdom found a ransom for our souls in Christ. Holiness approved of it. Justice is satisfied with it. Truth proclaims it. — *“Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?”*

Because He suffered, bled and died,  
Because He reigns, our God on High,  
Because He's just to justify,  
Our Savior shall be satisfied!

*“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”*

# Chapter 144

## “Abide With Us”

### Luke 24:29

“But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them” (Luke 24:29).

Can the Son of God be forced to do anything? Can man compel the Christ of God, by any means, to anything? The answer to those questions may surprise you. As the Lord Jesus walked along the Emmaus road with these two disciples, when they got close to the village and started to turn in, “*he made as though he would have gone further*” (Luke 24:28). His feet were turned to go on down the road, but not his heart. His heart was still with them. He acted like he was going to leave them, because he wanted to constrain them to constrain him to abide with them. He wanted to make them want him.

### Examples

There are other examples of this kind in the Scriptures. You will remember that one dark night when the disciples were on the sea, a terrible storm arose. They were terrified. Suddenly, they saw a figure walking across the raging waves of the sea. Like here, the disciples did not know that it was their Savior. As he approached their storm tossed boat, it appeared that he was going to walk right by them. Then, “*they cried out for fear.*” As soon as he heard their cry, he stopped; and “*straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*”

As the Lord Jesus made his way to Calvary, having set his

face like a flint to go to Jerusalem, that he might suffer and die in our room and stead, nothing could stop him. Nothing could even cause him to take a backward glance over his shoulder, or break his stride. But, just as he was going out of Jericho, he heard a poor, blind beggar cry out, "*Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.*" And, immediately, "*Jesus stood still.*"

On another occasion, a poor, desperate Canaanite woman came to him crying, "*Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word*" (Matthew 15:22-23). He made as though he did not hear her. Why was that ear, which was always open to the call of misery, closed to this woman? Why did he answer her not a word? It was because he wanted to open her heart wider, wide enough to receive the blessing he was about to bestow.

That is often the way he works with us. Our blessed Savior often makes it appear that he will leave us, or that he has left us, that he may graciously cause us to cry after him. Oh, how he loves for us to cry after him! Oh, how the Son of God loves for us to entreat him not to leave us! He does so, because he ever delights to abide with us.

Our dear Lord often proves our love by withholding his mercies until we know our need of his mercy. He has promised to do us good. He has promised to bless us. He has promised that he will never leave us, nor forsake us. But he says, "*I will yet for this be enquired of to do it*" (Ezekiel 36:37). He loves to draw out our desires after him, because it is good for us, and because he delights to hear us express our need of him.

That is how he dealt with Jacob at Peniel. Remember, it was not Jacob who wrestled with the Lord. It was the Lord who wrestled with Jacob. He had come for the purpose of blessing his chosen one; but he would not do so until Jacob had to have him. He said to Jacob, "*Let me go, for the day breaketh.*" But Jacob was in desperate need. He cried, "*I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*" (Genesis 32:26). And the Lord blessed him.

We have another remarkable and instructive example of our

Savior's gracious dealing in this manner with his chosen in the Song of Solomon (5:2-16). I urge you to read that passage with great care, asking God the Holy Spirit to apply its message to your heart.<sup>28</sup>

So it was here in Luke 24. As they drew near to Emmaus, our Lord "*made as though he would have gone further,*" because he wanted to constrain them to constrain him to abide with them. And so we read in our text, "*they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them*" (v. 29).

Christ, our Hope, our Strength, our God,  
You have redeemed us by Your blood;  
Through You alone we're saved from sin;  
You've proved Yourself the sinner's Friend!

Often when gathered in this place,  
You've come with tokens of Your grace,  
And blessed the preaching of Your Word,  
Come again, beloved Lord!

Enter our hearts and show Your face;  
Abide with us, dear Prince of Peace;  
Come now and make each heart Your own,  
Your house, Your temple, and Your throne!

Keep us from grieving You with sin,  
Subdue our lusts and reign within;  
Abide with us for evermore;  
Make us abide in You, our Lord!

"*Abide with us.*" — That is my unceasing prayer. Oh, how I

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28 This passage in the Song of Solomon (5:2-16) is of such tremendous importance that I encourage you to read my comments on it in my *Discovering Christ in the Song of Solomon*, (Published by Evangelical Press, Darlington, England - 2005), as well as those by Roger Ellsworth in *He is Altogether Lovely* (Published by Evangelical Press, Darlington, England - 1998), and John Gill's *Exposition of the Book of Canticles* (Published by the Primitive Baptist Library of Carthage, Illinois - 1980).

pray that he will abide with me, abide with my family, abide with the local church family he has given me, and abide with you, for without him we can do nothing. Without him, we are nothing!

## "They Constrained Him"

*"They constrained him."* — What a remarkable word that is! The specific word here translated "*constrained*" is a very strong word. It means, "to compel by use of force." It is only used in one other place in the Scriptures. It is used in Acts 16:15, where Lydia constrained Paul and Silas to abide in her house.

*"They constrained him."* — The words might be translated, "They held him by force." How? By what force was the Lord of Glory constrained? How was he compelled? What force could force the Son of God to do anything? There is only one such force put before us in all the Book of God. Our Lord Jesus was constrained by the cry of these poor, needy souls, — "*Abide with us.*" That cry constrained him to go in and "*tarry with them.*" He was not constrained by their faith. At the time, they did not know who he was. He was not constrained by any promise from his poor disciples. He was constrained by their need of him, by their felt need of that which only he could provide. So it is with us.

## "Abide with Us"

His conversation had been so engaging, so heavenly and instructive, so sweet and delightful, so powerful and moving, so beneficial to their souls that they could not bear to have him part from them. So "*they constrained him, saying, Abide with us.*"

This is not the Master speaking to the disciples, but the disciples to the Master. It is not the Lord Jesus that is standing at the door and saying, "*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.*" It is a pair of disciples that is saying, "Come in with us, blessed of the Lord. '*Abide with us.*'" And, as he blest Jacob before parting from him, so here he went

in and sat down with them.

When he did, he brought his blessing with him. He filled the house with the fragrance of his presence and the odor of the ointment of his grace. “*He sat at meat with them*” (v. 30). He gave them bread to eat, bread he had blessed especially in their presence for them (v. 30). He opened their eyes and caused them to know him (v. 31). He caused their hearts to burn within them (v. 32).

“*They constrained him, saying, Abide with us,*” because they were not willing to part with him. O Spirit of God, give us grace that we may follow the example of these disciples.

Abide with us, our Savior,  
Let not Your mercy cease;  
From every foe defend us,  
And keep our souls in peace.

Abide with us, our Savior,  
To us open Your Word,  
That we may, now and ever,  
Here find our blessed Lord.

Abide with us, our Savior,  
And guide us in Your light;  
Increase to us Your favor,  
And save us by Your might.

## Our Need

Our blessed Savior heals as many as have need of healing (Luke 9:11). He visits those who need him, and abides with them as long as he is needed. But he always departs from those who have no need for him (Matthew 19:1). If we would constrain the Lord Jesus to abide with us, we must, like these disciples, pour out our hearts’ need to him (Job 23:4; Isaiah 43:26).

Savior, “*abide with us,*” because these are days of great trouble, heaviness and sorrow. “*Abide with us,*” because this

world is empty without you. Life is death, if you are not with us. This world would be an empty place, a house left desolate without you, without the sound of your voice, or your footsteps. All is emptiness and cold without you. It is Christ who fills our lives, rejoices our hearts, and lights up our homes. He, and he alone gives us gladness in this wilderness. O blessed Savior, *“abide with us!”*

*“Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent,”* because all is darkness without you. We do not know what lies before us, what our future is to be. We know the past, we know the present, but the future is hidden from us. For that future and all its uncertainties, we need you to be our Guide and our Protector. We need you to light up our path. We need you to defend us and keep us. We need you to comfort and cheer us. We need you to hold us by the right hand of your righteousness. We need you to carry us across the swelling Jordan. We need you to present us to the Father.

Who will fight for us, who will deliver us and keep us to the last, in all changes, trials and sorrows? Abide with us. Leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation, O Rest of the weary, O Light of the dark, O Saviour of the lost, O Joy of the sorrowful, O Helper of the helpless, —unchanging Companion, Friend and Brother, O blessed Kinsman, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning, — the same yesterday, today, and forever, *“abide with us!”* Lead us out, lead us in, lead us along the way, lead us beside the still waters, lead us into your banqueting house, and let your banner over us be love!

*“Abide with us,”* — because earth’s night is at hand. The sun of time is going down behind the hills. The end of all things is at hand. The day of the Lord hastens on. Satan is in a rage, *“because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.”* Antichrist is rampant everywhere. Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse. Perilous times have come. Wars and rumors of wars cover the earth. Earthquakes and tsunamis, tornadoes and hurricanes cause men’s hearts everywhere to fail them for fear.

*“If the foundations be destroyed, What shall the righteous do?”* We can do nothing except constrain the Lord Jesus, crying,

“*abide with us!*” — “*Abide with us*” in all your mercy, love and grace, in all your strength and help, in all your joy and peace. — “*Abide with us*” forever.

“Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day,  
Earth’s joys grow dim; its glories pass away!  
Change and decay in all around I see. —  
Thou Who changest not, abide with me!”

### “He went In”

I cannot fail to call your attention to the last sentence of verse 29. — “*And he went in to tarry with them.*” Like these disciples, in the Song of Solomon we see the church in great importunity, seeking her Beloved. And when she found him, she constrained him to abide with her. May God the Holy Spirit ever show us our constant need of our Savior and constrain us to constrain him to “*abide with us.*”

“*It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother’s house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.*” (Song of Solomon 3:4-5)

Let us, by crying constantly to our Savior, constrain him to “*abide with us.*”

# Chapter 145

## “Behold My Hands”

Luke 24:36-53

“And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them *his* hands and *his* feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took *it*, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed

them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:36-53).

Several women, who were disciples of our Lord, got up early in the morning and came to the tomb where the Lord Jesus had been buried. They were bringing spices they had prepared for the body of their beloved Master. But when they arrived at the tomb, “*they found the stone rolled away,*” and saw that the Lord’s body was gone. Then two angels appeared to them and said, “*Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.*” Immediately, they ran back into the city with the good news of the Lord’s resurrection. But when they told the apostles what they had seen and heard, “*their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not*” (v. 11).

That same day two of the disciples left Jerusalem to go to Emmaus. As they walked along the Emmaus road, they discussed the events of the past three days. Their hearts were heavy. Their minds were filled with confusion as they tried to understand the meaning of our Lord’s message to them in John 13-16, the prayer in John 17, and the significance of the Lord’s Supper he had taught them to observe. They were not able to comprehend why he had been crucified as a common criminal. Though he had clearly told them, the Spirit of God had not given them understanding; and they were terribly confused.

As they walked along the way discussing these things, the Lord Jesus drew near and walked with them. But they did not recognize him. In verse 17 he asked them, “*What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?*” Then Cleopas explained to him why they were so perplexed (vv. 18-24). Then the Savior explained the Scriptures to them, telling them how that all the law and prophets spoke of him (vv. 25-27). When they got to Emmaus, the Lord went in to have supper with them. As he prayed at the table, their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Then he vanished out of their sight. The two disciples then looked at each other, and

said, “*Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?*” (v. 32).

## Peace Commanded

Immediately, these two men went back to Jerusalem and found the apostles and their brethren and told them all they had seen and heard. As they talked, suddenly, the Lord Jesus appeared in their midst, and said, “*Peace be unto you*” (v. 36).

What a gracious Savior Christ is! “How truly blessed is it,” wrote Robert Hawker, “to behold, the gracious attention of the Lord Jesus, in thus affording such repeated testimonies of the reality of his resurrection to his disciples, both when separate, and when collected together.” Here he is, standing in the midst of his disciples, who just three days earlier had all shamefully forsaken him. One had denied him three times. All of them had been backsliders and cowards. Yet, when our Lord stood in the midst of these men, there was not a word of rebuke, not a tinge of anger, not even an indication of disapproval. Calmly, lovingly, graciously, our Lord said, “*Peace be unto you!*”

It is as though the Lord, freshly risen from the grave, had said, “Your sins are all forgiven. My blood has washed them all away. I will not charge you with sin.” Truly, the love of Christ is a love that surpasses all knowledge. It is his glory to pass over our iniquities, pardon our sins, and hide our transgressions. He “*delighteth in mercy.*” In his infinite heart there is an infinite willingness to forgive sin. He is more willing to forgive than we are to seek forgiveness.

Our all-glorious, ever-gracious Christ says to his fallen, sinful people, “*Peace be unto you.*” Where is the sinner who needs to fear such a Savior? In the hand of Christ there is mercy enough and to spare. He says, “*Fury is not in me*” (Isaiah 27:4). Christ is willing to save. Christ is willing to forgive. Christ is willing to restore the fallen. We who are so freely forgiven ought to love our dear Savior and willingly render to him the obedience of our hearts. And surely we, who have been so freely forgiven, will freely forgive our brethren. Those who follow the Prince of Peace

will be peaceable themselves, gentle, kind, charitable, and forgiving. Forgiven sinners are forgiving sinners.

Yet, as the Lord Jesus stood in the midst of his disciples, they were terrified. Even then they did not believe. Still, he was gracious. He tenderly condescended to minister to their weakness and infirmity. He said, “*Why are ye troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts?*” (v. 38) He might justly have scolded them and said, “Where is your faith? Why do you refuse to believe me, even when I stand before you?” But that is not his way. Instead of dealing harshly with his children, our Savior gently stretched out his arms, and said, “*Behold my hands.*” If we can by faith behold the hands of our Savior, His hands will remove our doubts, assure our hearts, and give us peace.

## Our Sovereign

Try to picture the Lord Jesus Christ standing before his trembling, terrified, unbelieving disciples. Try to picture him standing before your own troubled heart. He says, “*Behold my hands.*” These are the hands that made the world. They are the hands of our Sovereign God and Savior.

“For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker” (Psalms 95:3-6).

He who is our Savior has the whole world in his hands. Why should we be afraid? What is the cause for our unbelief? Is anything too hard for the Lord? We only fear when we look to our hands. “*O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens... When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained: what is man, that thou visitest him?*” (Psalm 8:1-3). Behold the hands of Christ, our sovereign Lord. These are the hands that made the world (Psalm 19:1-6).

The most absurd, foolish philosophy in the world is the

philosophy of evolution. Learned idiots tell us that all the rare beauty, wonder, and precise order of heaven and earth simply evolved by chance. Yet, the same men, with all their science, technology, and art combined cannot even figure out a way to make a wiggling worm or a pesky gnat! An observation Thomas Watson made over 300 years ago is worth remembering, “To create requires infinite power. All the world cannot make a fly.”

Jesus Christ is not a creature of God. He is God the Creator. His are the hands that made the world; and his are the hands that rule the world (John 1:1-3; 3:35).

“Behold the Man upon the throne  
Who rules in heaven, earth, and hell:  
That Man is Christ, our Savior God,  
His throne should all our fears dispel.

*“The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.”* The Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Savior, sovereignly rules all things. As Stephen Charnock wrote, “To be God and sovereign are inseparable.” Everything is absolutely dependent upon and controlled by the will and power of God. The beginning and the end of all things is God. Our Savior’s sovereign control of all things as God should control our hearts and give us peace, contentment and joy in all things.

The hands of our Savior, who made all things and rules all things with total sovereignty, are the hands that rule all things for the eternal good of our souls (Romans 8:28). *“If God be for us, who can be against us?”*

“Since all the downward tracks of time  
God’s watchful eye surveys,  
Oh, who so wise to choose our lot,  
And regulate our days?

Good, when He gives, supremely good!  
Nor less when He denies:  
Even crosses from His sovereign hand  
Are blessings in disguise.

Since none can doubt His matchless love,  
Immeasurably kind,  
To His unerring, gracious will  
Be every wish resigned.”

## Our Surety

“*Behold, my hands.*” These are the hands of our sovereign God; and these are the hands of our covenant Surety and Good Shepherd. He said...

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

This is every believer’s security, satisfaction, and assurance before God. — We are in his hands! God the Father put us in his hands as our covenant Surety before the world began. And as our Surety and our Good Shepherd the Lord Jesus assumed total responsibility for our souls from everlasting. The shepherd alone is responsible for the sheep (John 6:37-40). The Lion of the tribe of Judah said, from old eternity, “I will be Surety for them” (Genesis 43:9); and God the Father laid upon him all responsibility for our souls.

## Our Substitute

“*Behold my hands.*” Can you see them? These are the hands of our blessed Substitute.

“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet” (Psalms 22:14-16).

In a sense we all ought to be like Thomas. The other disciple said, “*We have seen the Lord!*” But Thomas said, “*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe*” (John 20:25). Each one must see Christ for himself. By faith we see in his hands the wounds of our Substitute (Isaiah 53:4-6). Do you see those wounds in his hands? Can you hear them speaking to your heart?

“Behold His hands, and hear them speak,  
I freely all forgive,  
These wounds were for your ransom made,  
I died that you might live!”

As I behold the wounds in the hands of my glorious Substitute, I am convinced that the justice of God is fully satisfied (Galatians 3:13), my sins are completely removed from me (Hebrews 9:26), the Son of God loves me (1 John 3:16), and I shall never perish (1 John 2:1-2).

“Five bleeding wounds he bears,  
Received on Calvary,  
They pour effectual prayers,  
They strongly plead for me.  
Forgive him, O forgive they cry,  
Nor let that ransomed sinner die!”

## Our Security

Are you terrified by your own weakness, insufficiency, and sin? Does Satan sometimes whisper in your ear, “You are sinking, you will prove a hypocrite at last, you will soon be mine”? Are you afraid? The Savior says, “*Behold My Hands!*” These are the hands of our security. We see this beautifully illustrated in Matthew 14:25-31.

When Peter was walking to the Savior across the calm waters of the early morning, all was well. He felt so good. But when he saw the storm approaching, he was terrified and began to sink. Then he cried, “*Lord, save me...And immediately Jesus stretched*

*forth his hand, and caught him.”*

On the sea of life many storms arise. The waves are high. The wind is strong. The clouds are heavy. We sometimes think we will surely fail, and that our vessel will be wrecked. But just when we think we are sinking, the Lord Jesus stretches forth his hand and catches us! Then all is well. Did he not say, “*I will never leave thee nor forsake thee...I will strengthen thee; yes, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness*”? Child of God, you are safe and secure in his hands all the time. He will keep you from falling.

“When the storms of life are raging, Stand by me;  
When the world is tossing me, Like a ship upon the sea,  
Thou who rulest wind and water, Stand by me.

In the midst of tribulation, Stand by me;  
When the hosts of hell assail, And my strength begins to fail,  
Thou who never lost a battle, Stand by me.

When I’m growing old and feeble, Stand by me;  
When my life becomes a burden, And I’m nearing chilly Jordan,  
O Thou “Lily of the Valley”, Stand by me.”

## Our Solace

Is your heart troubled and your mind perplexed? Listen our Savior’s gentle reproof. — “*Why are ye troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My Hands.*” These are the hands of our solace. These are the hands of blessing and consolation. We read in verse 50, “*And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.*” He says to you and me, “*Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God; believe also in me.*”

Behold the Savior’s hands, and see how he blesses his children (Mark 10:13-16). — “*Blessed is the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee*” (Psalm 65:4). —

*“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin”*  
(Romans 4:8).

Here is a sweet word of solace for God’s children. The hands that chasten us are the hands that bless us and make us whole. — *“Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty; for he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole”* (Job 5:16-17).

Here is a word of solace for God’s servants. Every true servant of God is in the hands of Christ. — *“He had in his right hand seven stars...The seven stars are the angels (pastors) of the seven churches”* (Revelation 1:16, 20).

## Our Salvation

Child of God, our Savior stretches out his arms to us and says, *“Behold my hands.”* These are the hands of our Sovereign, the hands of our Surety, the hands of our Substitute, the hands of our security, and the hands of our solace.

And there is a word here for those who are yet the children of wrath. Sinner, by the preaching of the gospel, the Son of God stretches out his arms to you, and says, *“Behold My Hands.”* They are the hands of our Salvation! — *“Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear”* (Isaiah 59:1). Trust your soul to the hands of Christ. He is able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him. Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father but by him.

The Lord Jesus Christ stands before our poor, needy souls in the gospel as one full of tenderness, with mercy in his hands, and love in his heart. Believe him. Oh, believe him! He is the great Savior of great sinners. He is a great Forgiver. Trust him, and you will find your transgressions put away and your sins pardoned forever. There’s mercy in his hands and grace in his command. He stretches out his hands to poor, needy sinners, and says, *“Come unto me!”*

The Son of God says, “*Behold my hands.*” Trust and be not afraid. But, let all refuse to trust him tremble. These are the hands of him who shall execute judgment in the last day. And it is written, “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Hebrews 10:31).

As the high priest was typical of our Lord Jesus in all other things, he typified our Savior when he lifted up his hands to bless them, with the blessing commanded by God upon them (Numbers 6:22-27). So our Savior, the true Nazarite having fulfilled his vow, the true High Priest of Israel, and the true sin-atonement Sacrifice, commands the blessing of God upon his people. Our great High Priest ascended to heaven as he was blessing his people, as if to tell us that his blessing is forever perpetual. And, as in the case of Manoah (Judges 13:20), our all-glorious Christ ascended in the fragrance of his own incense.

Behold his hands, and worship him. Behold his hands, and walk before him with great joy, praising and blessing God. Your pierced hands, O blessed Savior, are the instruments of new creation, the source of all blessings, the symbol of redemption, forgiveness, grace, and salvation, the display of your infinite love for us. Let us, now and forever, behold your hands with gratitude, confident faith, and joy.

# Chapter 146

## Risen – But Still the Same

Luke 24:36-53

“And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them *his* hands and *his* feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took *it*, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed

them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:36-53).

We generally assume that what a person has been he is and will be. With men that is sometimes a mistake. Men do change and are changed. But, with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, that is neither an assumption nor a mistake. He does not change and cannot be changed. What he has been he is now, and he shall forever be. Our Lord Jesus Christ is “*the same, yesterday, and today, and forever.*” He declares, “*I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*” It is he alone of whom it can be said, he “*is, and was, and is to come.*”

The two disciples who had walked with our risen Savior along the Emmaus road, after the Lord Jesus made himself known to them, were so overwhelmed with joy that they seem to have forgotten why they had come to Emmaus. They immediately returned to Jerusalem to tell their brethren the good news (Luke 24:33, 35).

Then, in verse 36 we read, “*And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them.*” The disciples were gathered together, probably in the same large, upper room in which the Lord Jesus had instituted the Lord’s Supper. How troubled and perplexed they were. Then, “*as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them.*” Our blessed Savior loves to meet with his saints when they are gathered together. He delights to reveal himself to us when we most need him.

In verses 36-53 Luke gives us a brief summary of those forty days between the resurrection and the ascension of our Redeemer. During those forty days, “*he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me*” (Acts 1:3-4).

## Peace Bestowed

Let's look at the first appearance of our risen Lord in the midst of his assembled church described in verses 36-43. "*Jesus himself stood in the midst of them,*" uninvited, unexpected, undeserved, but most welcome. He stood in the center to be near to them all. He appeared in the midst of them to bestow peace upon them all (vv. 36-43).

"And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them *his* hands and *his* feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took *it*, and did eat before them."

The Lord Jesus had now finished his blessed work of redemption. He had entered in once into the holy place. He had, with his own blood, obtained eternal redemption for his elect. And now he appeared in the midst of his disciples in exactly the same character and nature in which he had walked with them before, to bestow exactly the same blessing he had bestowed upon them in the days of his earthly ministry. Our risen Redeemer is the same in his person and grace as he has ever been. — "*Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.*" (See John 14:27.)

This is particularly blessed when we remember the men to whom these words were addressed. Our Lord Jesus spoke these words to those very same disciples who three days before had shamefully forsaken him and fled. They had broken their promises. They had forgotten their professed readiness to die with him. They had been scattered, "*every man to his own,*" and

left him to die alone. One of them had even denied him three times.

They were all “*backsliding children*” (Jeremiah 3:22). But the Lord Jesus had promised, “*I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely*” (Hosea 14:4). Therefore, “*Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.*” Not a word of rebuke is spoken. Not a single sharp reproof fell from his lips. Calmly and quietly he appeared in the midst of them, and spoke peace. — “*Peace be unto you!*”

How free his love must be! Truly, his is love that passes knowledge! It is his glory to pass over iniquity, transgression, and sin! He “*delighteth in mercy.*” He is far more willing to forgive than we are to be forgiven, and far more ready to pardon than we are to be pardoned. There is in his great, almighty, infinite heart infinite forgiveness. Though our sins have been as scarlet, he makes them as white as snow. He has blotted them out, cast them behind his back, buried them in the depths of the sea, and remembers them no more.

Though, like these poor disciples, we are constantly stumbling and falling, constantly “*backsliding children,*” his forgiveness is free, full, and undeserved forgiveness. The peace and forgiveness he speaks to our troubled hearts is the same peace he spoke to them. It is peace obtained by the blood of his cross, flowing from our crucified, risen Savior, the peace of complete redemption, perfect atonement and absolute forgiveness. He speaks peace to our souls, saying, “*I have blotted out thy sins!...Fury is not in me!*” Christ is the Savior who gives peace to needy sinners. In his pierced hands there is mercy enough and to spare. He raises the dead, revives the languishing, restores the fallen, and heals the wounded. There is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared (Psalm 130:4).

## Peace Experienced

Though he spoke peace, these poor souls were still incapable of enjoying it. — “*They were terrified and affrighted*” (v. 37). Then our blessed Savior gave these poor, troubled souls undeniable

proof of his accomplished redemption, by which he assured their hearts, causing them to experience the peace he spoke (vv. 38-43).

“And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them *his* hands and *his* feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took *it*, and did eat before them.”

It is one thing to hear the words, “*Peace be unto you;*” but it is something else to experience peace in your soul. And our Savior causes his own to experience the peace he gives. He doesn’t just say, “Have peace.” He causes us to know his peace in the blessed experience of grace, in the sweet experience of knowing him. — He gives us peace!

He said, “*Behold my hands and feet...touch me and see.*” He stood before them, stretched out his nail pierced hands, and pointed to his wounded feet, through which the nails had passed, by which his body had been fastened to the cursed tree. Then he took “*a piece of broiled fish and of an honeycomb...and did eat before them.*” By these things, the Lord Jesus removed all their doubt and all their fear. So it is with us. We enjoy the sweet peace of redemption, forgiveness, and everlasting salvation as we handle our Savior personally by faith in the sweet experience of his grace (1 John 1:1-3).

Those very same wounds, with which our Redeemer gave peace to these disciples, convincing them of his accomplished redemption and of his triumph over death by his resurrection, are the wounds he perpetually and everlastingly spreads before our Father in heaven for us. There, as our mighty Advocate and Great High Priest, our Savior pleads the merit of his sin-atonement blood and substitutionary death for our everlasting salvation.

Yes, the crucified, risen Christ has returned to heaven, “*to*

*appear in the presence of God for us*” (Hebrews 9:24). His blood speaks to God for us (Hebrews 12:24). There he stands forever the “*Lamb which had been slain*” (Revelation 5:6). Christ is our great High Priest before the mercy-seat. He has our names engraved upon his heart as he stands before God, making intercession for us (Exodus 28:29-30). That which the saints of old passionately desired and looked for has come to fruition in the intercession of our mighty Advocate. He has set us as a seal upon his heart, as a seal upon his arm, because of his love that is stronger than death (Song of Solomon 8:6).

What a blessed encouragement this is to me in times of spiritual barrenness and leanness of soul! There is One whose pierced hands and side plead for me, when I have no power to plead for myself. — “*If any man sin, we have John, an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins*” (1 John 2:1-2).

Our Lord might have commanded his disciples to believe that he had risen. He might have sharply reproved their unbelief. Instead, in great mercy, he stooped to their need. He stooped to their weakness, and said, “*Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold (Literally – You shall behold!) my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see (Literally – You shall see!); for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have*” (vv. 38-39).

What a great example our Savior is to us in all things. When we are dealing with one another, let us ever remember his gracious dealings with us. Weak disciples are disciples still. Weak brethren are brethren still. They need to be taught and led with patience, not upbraided and handled roughly. To the weak, let us become as weak that we might minister to the weak (1 Corinthians 9:22).

## Christ in the Midst

Verses 36-43 describe our Lord’s first appearance to his assembled church after the resurrection. Here we see the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of his brethren, assembled with his

saints. He appeared in their midst, he visited his church, when his disciples had acted very shamefully, fleeing from him at his betrayal and deserting him at his trial. They were unprepared and unbelieving, doubting his promise and refusing the testimony of his messengers. They greatly needed him, for they were like sheep without a shepherd. Yet, they had come together in his name, as his disciples, in loving memory of him. They lamented his absence and greatly desired him. Some among them testified that they had been with him, and told others what they saw, experienced, and heard him speak.

When he appeared in their midst, he spoke peace to his disciples, showed himself to them, permitted each of them to handle him, and proved himself to them again. Are not we in the same condition as these disciples? May we not hopefully look for our Lord Jesus to appear in our midst?

This is what we miss when we absent ourselves from the assembly of his saints. — There was one disciple, a true disciple, a true believer, who was not present at this assembly. Thomas was not with his brethren in the house of God. We are not told why he was not present; but he was not there (John 20:24). Perhaps he thought he had something more important to do. Perhaps he was overcome with unbelief. Perhaps he was in a very low condition. We do not know. But this we do know: — When his Redeemer appeared in the midst of his brethren, Thomas was not there. I do not know, but I doubt Thomas ever missed another service. When you absent yourself from the house of God, you absent yourself from the ministry of the Word and the fellowship of your family. And you may absent yourself from the blessedness of Christ's manifest presence, from the indescribable privilege of seeing him, hearing him, handling him, and feasting with him.

## Christ's Doctrine

In the next paragraph (Luke 24:44-48) our Lord Jesus gave his disciples a summary of his doctrine. He summarized everything he had taught them while he walked with them in the flesh.

“And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.”

First, in summarizing everything he had taught, the Lord Jesus now showed these disciples the meaning and message of the Old Testament Scriptures. The risen Savior is the same in his doctrine as he has ever been. — “*And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me*” (v. 44).

The most casual reading of the Gospel narratives makes it clear that these men knew the Old Testament very well. They knew how it was written by inspiration of God. They knew how it was compiled and preserved by divine providence. They knew its history and knew its letter. But its meaning and its message was hidden from their eyes, until the Savior said, “Everything that you have read in the Old Testament, all the law, all the prophecies, all the types and ceremonies, all the rituals and sacrifices, and all the Psalms and Proverbs are about me.” Yet, even then, they did not understand his words. But “*then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.*”

The fact is no human being can understand the Book of God except as God himself gives him understanding. Spiritual discernment is the gift of God the Holy Spirit. A man can study Greek and Hebrew, learn everything there is to know about grammar, ancient biblical history, archaeology, philosophy, theology, hermeneutics, exegesis, and rhetoric, and still have

absolutely no knowledge of Holy Scripture. The Book of God is a Book of divine revelation that cannot be understood without divine illumination. Only God himself can take the things of God and show them to a man (1 Corinthians 2:9-15).

Can you imagine what it must have been like to have been present, to have heard that sermon, and to have received that blessed enlightenment? What a moment it must have been! What awe the disciples must have felt! How differently the Savior's words must have sounded! How majestic, how heavenly, how powerful! They now heard him as their risen Redeemer, coming from the other world to open their understanding. Now, for the first time, they understood all that he had taught them. Now, for the first time, they understood the vast, infinite importance of his mission in coming into the world. Now, for the first time, they began to know the meaning of his infinite grace, everlasting love, and immutable mercy as the Christ of God, their God, their Redeemer, their Savior, and their Lord and King!

## His Death

Then, the Lord Jesus spoke to his disciples about his death on the cross. He had done so many, many times before (Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; Mark 8:31-32; 9:31; 10:33-34; Luke 18:31-33). He did not speak of his death as an unhappy misfortune, or as a thing to be lamented, but as a necessity. — *And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day*" (v. 46). There are three things revealed here that must be understood. These three things are vital. No one understands the Bible who does not understand these three things.

1. **The death of Christ was according to the will and purpose of God.** — He was delivered to death "*by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*" (Acts 2:23). He died in our place and room, as our Substitute, by the sovereign will and eternal decree of God, because "*it pleased the Lord to bruise him.*"

**2. The death of God's darling Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, was necessary for our salvation.** — Without the death of Christ, God's law could never have been fulfilled, divine justice could never have been satisfied, sin could never have been put away, sinners could never have been pardoned, forgiven, justified, and made righteous before God, and God could never have shown mercy.

The cross of Christ was the only solution of a mighty difficulty, the only answer to that ancient question, "*How can a man be just with God?*" (Job 9:2). The cross untied the knot. It is the death of Christ upon the cursed tree that makes it possible for our God to be "*a just God and a Savior*" (Isaiah 45:20). Because Christ once died, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, God is "*just, and the Justifier*" of the ungodly (Romans 3:26).

It is only by the blood of Christ crucified that sinners can draw near to God with boldness, with full assurance of faith, in confident hope of eternal life. Christ, by suffering and dying as our Substitute in our stead, the just for the unjust, has made a way by which we can draw near to God. — And his death guarantees that all for whom he suffered and died shall come to God by him!

**3. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures** (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). — How did Christ die? He died voluntarily, by his own will. He said, "*I lay down my life...The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*" Our Lord Jesus died vicariously, as our Substitute in the place of his elect (2 Corinthians 5:21). And he died victoriously, triumphantly, having accomplished all that he intended to accomplish, having obtained eternal redemption for his people (Galatians 3:13).

The cross of Christ is all our hope, all our peace, all our salvation. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the cancellation of all our debt, the restoration of all our loss, the redemption of all God's elect. — "*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified*

*unto me, and I unto the world.” — “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”*

Upon the cross I see him bleed,  
And by the sight from guilt am freed;  
Christ crucified removed my sin,  
And by His grace I'm born again.

To see my Savior as He rose  
Assures my faith, disarms my foes;  
Satan's assaults I overcome,  
By pointing to my Savior's tomb.

Exalted on His glorious throne,  
My Savior makes my cause His own;  
No good can I now be denied,  
For Jesus lives, and will provide.

He looks, with tender pity down,  
And holds for me the conqu'ror's crown;  
Though pressed with griefs and cares before,  
My soul revives, nor asks no more.

By faith I see the day at hand  
When in His presence I shall stand;  
Then it shall be my endless bliss,  
To see Him where, and as he is.

## Repentance and Remission

In verse 47 our Lord Jesus goes on to tell us that he died as our sin-atonement Substitute, *“that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”* Notice that our Savior did not say that he died so that we could tell sinners to repent. Rather, he tells us that he died that we might proclaim repentance. There is a difference. When God commands all men everywhere to repent, he commands them to turn to him. But here our Savior, by virtue of his death on the

cross, commands us to preach repentance, that is to proclaim the turning of sinners to him. By virtue of his sin-atonement sacrifice, we proclaim liberty to the captives (Isaiah 61:1-3; Zechariah 9:11-12).

The word repentance basically means “reversal.” And the gospel we preach proclaims a complete reversal. The repentance accomplished for us, the repentance we proclaim in the gospel is a reversal of all things for us by Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). The repentance God commands of sinners is a reversal of our thoughts, minds, and attitudes about how sins are remitted.

This proclamation of reversal is the blessed proclamation of the remission of sins. Everything has been reversed for us, because he has put away (remitted) our sins. His prisoners are sent forth out of their prison, because he has remitted their sins. “*And ye,*” you who have been turned to him by hearing him declare that he has put away your sins, “*are witnesses of these things*” (v. 48). Every redeemed sinner is, in his place, Christ’s missionary, his witness, bearing his own testimony to his Savior’s accomplishments, his grace, and the free forgiveness of sins found in him.

Our Savior commanded his disciples to preach the gospel everywhere, to all men, among all nations; and he said, “*beginning at Jerusalem.*” Robert Hawker wrote...

“Those Jerusalem-sinners, whose hearts were to be called by sovereign grace on the then approaching day of *Pentecost*, were there; many of whom had joined the Scribes and Elders in his crucifixion, and were now triumphing in having shed his blood. Yet, to this *Jerusalem*, this slaughter-house of his Prophets, and himself also, Jesus will have the first proclamation of mercy in his death made! Oh! the riches of his grace! Oh! the boundless love of Christ, which passeth knowledge!”

None are beyond the reach of grace. None are beyond the reach of omnipotent mercy. It is the glory of our Great Physician that he heals incurable cases. The things that are impossible to men are possible with Christ.

## Glorious End

In verses 50-53 Luke gives us a very brief description of our Savior's glorious end.

“And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.”

Here, Luke takes one giant step, moving from the Lord's resurrection to his ascension forty days later. Here he shows us in simple language the blessed, triumphant climax of our Redeemer's work on this earth. Our risen Christ is the same in his resurrection glory as he has ever been (John 17:5).

*“He lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them.”* — He left them when in the very act of blessing them. The high priest in the Old Testament typified Christ in the lifting up of his hands to bless the people. He, however, prayed for the blessing of God upon his people. The Lord Jesus commands it. Our great High Priest ascended while blessing, as if to say that his blessing is forever. And, as in the instance of Manoah, he did wondrously, ascending in the sweet incense of his own sacrifice (Judges 13:19-20).

The Lord Jesus was carried up to heaven, upon the merit of his own blood and righteousness as the Lamb of God slain for our sins, and accepted as our Forerunner to be the Anchor of our souls, to be our Advocate with the Father, and to assure us of our indestructible, everlasting salvation, security, and blessedness (Romans 8:32-39).

When they saw him ascend, after hearing his words and receiving his blessing (his perpetual, unceasing, everlasting blessing), the redeemed of the Lord worshipped him and went away with great joy, because he had *“opened their*

*understanding.*” Oh, may he do the same for you and me continually! If he will give us a conscious interest in his salvation, causing us to hear the word of the truth of the gospel of our salvation, we will worship him with great joy and put our own “Amen” to his blessed name and work.

## Coming Again

“And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10-11).

The day will soon come when this same Jesus shall return from heaven in like manner as he ascended. He will come forth, like the Jewish high priest of old, to bless his people, to gather his saints together, and to restore all things (Leviticus 9:23; Acts 3:21). For that day, let us wait, “*looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*” Until that day, let us love and adore him, trust and serve him as his “*witnesses of these things*” to the praise of his glory.

# Chapter 147

## His Nail Pierced Hands

Luke 24:50-53

“And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:50-53).

Once every year, on the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament, the high priest would lay aside his glorious apparel and put on a common white robe and linen trousers, identifying himself with the common people. He would take the lamb appointed for sacrifice and slay it. He would go alone into the holy of holies with the blood of the lamb. There he would sprinkle the sacrificial blood upon the mercy-seat, which covered the ark of the covenant.

That atoning sacrifice God required once every year for propitiation, so that the sins of the nation might be covered. Then, the high priest would put on his gorgeous garments again, the robes of fine linen, scarlet, and blue, with the sweet-sounding bells and pomegranates. He would put on his glittering breastplate and place the miter on his head.

Then he would come out in that gorgeous apparel as God’s high priest, lift up his hands, and bless the people of God in words like these — *“The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace”*

(Numbers 6:24-26).

## Type Fulfilled

That elaborate ceremony was ordained of God to typify the work of Christ, that One who was to come who would be both the true Sacrifice and the true High Priest over the household of faith. We see that type beautifully fulfilled in Luke 24:50-53.

Here we see the Lord Jesus Christ lifting up his hands as our glorious High Priest and blessing his people. Our Savior had for a while laid aside his robe of glory and splendor, and veiled himself in human flesh. He offered himself, body, soul, and spirit, as a propitiatory, sin-atonement sacrifice to God. — *“By his own blood he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us”* (Hebrews 9:12). And now our great High Priest, just as he was ascending into heaven, lifted up his hands to bless his people. — *“And he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.”* Let us now, as we conclude our study of Luke’s Gospel, focus our minds and our hearts on his nail-pierced hands.

Having spoiled the grave, our Lord proved his power over things that are under the earth. Tarrying for forty days among men after his resurrection, he claimed his power over the earth itself. Then he ascended up through the air to show that the dominion of the prince of the power of the air was broken. Finally, the Son of God entered again into the heaven of heavens, claiming his throne of total and universal sovereignty as our blessed God-man Mediator. From the lowest depths of the grave to the highest realms of glory, Jesus Christ reigns supreme over the vast domains, King of kings and Lord of lords.

## His Reasons

Our Lord Jesus might have gone straight to heaven on the morning of his resurrection; but he had reasons for tarrying on the earth for forty days. I want to briefly point out some of the reasons why our Lord remained here for forty days after his

resurrection. In the days of Noah the waters of God's judgment overflowed the earth for forty days. Our Savior was in the wilderness for forty days, where he was tempted of the devil. And now the victorious Christ tarries for forty days of triumph in the very place where he had fought the battle and won the victory. But why did he tarry here for those forty days?

1. Those forty days were sufficient to prove to all mankind that he had truly risen from the dead. He came forth from the grave, not as some sort of phantom or ghost, but as a real man of flesh and bones.

2. During this time, our Lord removed every lingering doubt from the minds of his disciples. He said, "*Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have*" (v. 39).

3. Again, he tarried here those forty days, because those instructions he had given to his disciples before his death needed a few finishing touches. He had yet many things to tell them, which they could not have understood before his death and resurrection.

4. But, primarily, our Lord Jesus tarried here for forty days so that he might issue the commission his church must follow so long as the world stands.

He said to Peter, "Feed my sheep...Feed my lambs." He commanded them all saying, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned." He would not make his departure from the world until his final orders had been given. The mighty Captain of our salvation marshaled his troops, set them in their ranks, and gave them their marching orders. He commanded them to march forward into battle, and onward to victory, with this word of promise — "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Then, just as he was leaving his troops upon the earth, and

going up to assume his throne, "*He lifted up his hands and blessed them.*" Can you picture the scene? There is the Son of God with his apostles and disciples gathered around him. They have come out of Jerusalem to the Mt. Olivet. Behind them was Jerusalem, the city left desolate and awaiting destruction, and the place called Calvary, where forty-three days earlier he had suffered, bled, and died as our Substitute. Just ahead were Bethany, the little village where he had performed the mighty miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, and the home into which he had been so often received as a welcome Guest, the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. And just below them was the Garden of Gethsemane, where for our sakes he had wrestled with death and hell, sweating blood.

We are not told all that took place that day; but it seems reasonable to me to suppose that our Lord must have sung a hymn with his beloved disciples. I imagine that there were some final, personal words to each of the disciples. He must have assured Peter, comforted James, inspired John, and encouraged Thomas. At any rate, he gave them his farewell message. Then, "*He lifted up his hands, and blessed them.*"

While he was blessing them, he broke the law of gravity and began to rise. The disciples must have been astonished. He began to rise up to heaven, slowly, majestically, until he was almost out of sight. Then, the astonished disciples saw a cloud between them and their Savior, and the Lord's body was gone. — "*A cloud received him out of their sight.*" Who knows what happened beyond that cloud? It was too glorious for human eyes to see, or for human ears to hear. But I think the angels of God must have begun to sing, "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in!*" One cried, "*Who is the King of glory?*" Another replied, "*The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle... The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.*" And now the ascended Christ sits as a King and a Priest upon his throne.

## Lifted to Bless

As he ascended, “*He lifted up his hands and blessed them.*” The hands of our Lord were lifted up to bless. Every blessing of divine grace flows to us freely from the nail pierced hands of the Son of God. Standing there upon the Mount of Olives, anticipating that glory which lay immediately before him, our Lord Jesus wanted to bless his disciples. He had opened his ministry with a proclamation of grace; and now his last act upon the earth is a benediction of grace.

These uplifted hands are the hands of our Lord and Redeemer. He said to his troubled, fearful disciples, “*Behold my hands.*” When he had “*showed them his hands,*” their hearts were comforted and filled with joy. These are the hands of our sovereign Creator, our eternal Surety, and our blessed Savior. These hands blessed the little children, stilled the tempest, saved perishing Peter, and raised the widow’s son. These hands assured doubting Thomas and comforted the troubled disciples. Are you in need? Are you in trouble? Is your heart anxious, burdened, and pressed down with care? Your Savior says, “*Behold my hands!*” His hands are lifted up to bless.

This blessing was not at all unusual. The hands of our Lord were always blessing hands. Throughout his earthly life, blessings flowed from them continually. During his earthly ministry, thousands received multiplied blessings from his hands. The four gospels are full of examples of blessings, which fell from the hands of Christ. He went about doing good. His hands scattered blessings like a farmer scatters his seed.

When our Lord lifted up his hands to bless his disciples, as he was leaving them, he was just doing what he had always done. The richest blessings we ever get from the hands of Christ are not unusual things at all, but just a continuation of his old ways. If this day the Son of God lifts up his hands to bless you, it will only be another link in the golden chain of his mercy. He has blessed us. He is blessing us. And he will continue to bless us. He is still the same.

But now Christ blessed his disciples in a somewhat different

manner. He blessed them with a new authority. Before he had prayed for blessings upon them. Now he pronounces the blessing! His work of sacrifice was done. The atonement was complete. And the blessings had been purchased. Before our Savior had looked up to heaven and asked for the blessings. Now, he looks down, as it were, from heaven and bestows the blessing, as one whose right and power it is to bless.

No one except the Lord Jesus Christ has the right, authority, and power to bless us. All who pretend to be priests (or priestly preachers) with power to bless are deceivers of men's souls. As our Savior lifts up his hands, he seems to be saying, "Look here, my children, all blessings are in these hands." These are the hands of our Daysman, the God-man Mediator.

Another thing that strikes me is the fact that the blessing of our Lord's hands was a full and complete blessing. Did you notice what our Savior said as he blessed them? Luke does not tell us that he said a word. He seems to have simply looked the blessing upon them. I can almost picture him. He stretched his arms upward and opened his hands wide, and waved them over the people. In that gesture he seems to be saying, "Look, my ransomed flock, all that I have is for you. All is yours. All that you need now, and all that you ever shall need is in these hands."

Once more, the blessing of our Lord's hands was a special, peculiar blessing. — "*He lifted up his hands and blessed them.*" This was a special, distinguishing blessing. It was not for the world, but for his own people. The teaching of "common grace" is a common delusion. The blessings of God's grace and goodness are special, family blessings reserved for the Lord's chosen. Yes, our God and Savior sends the sunshine and the rain upon the reprobate, and they receive the temporal benefit of such; but even the sunshine and the rain descend upon the earth for God's elect. The blessings of God are for his own (Romans 8:28). Those things that men refer to as the blessings of "common grace" will only add to the condemnation of the wicked. God's elect are blessed in all things (Deuteronomy 28:1-14); but the wicked and unbelieving are cursed in all things (Deuteronomy 28:15-46). Let all men know that in all things, "*the LORD doth put*

*a difference between the Egyptians and Israel*” (Exodus 11:7). In all things he is particularly and distinguishingly gracious to his own elect. Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. He laid down his life for his sheep. Here he blessed his redeemed ones. He could not and would not withhold one blessing from those for whom he had poured out his life’s blood. As our High Priest, he had been discriminating in his prayer; and he is discriminating in his blessing (John 17:9, 20).

Are we now blessed in Christ? If so, it is because we always were blessed in him (Ephesians 1:3-14). And we shall yet be blessed by those dear hands. There is no power in heaven, in earth, or in hell which can reverse the blessings of our Lord. He who has ascended up to heaven left us a legacy of blessings from his hands. His hands will bless us while we live, bless us when we die, and will bless us in the judgment. His hands shall wave away his enemies into everlasting fire. And his hands will beckon us to glory, saying, “*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*” Christ lifted up his hands to bless us, and we are blessed indeed!

## Nail Pierced Hands

Look again at those hands of our Lord by which we are blessed. They are nail pierced hands. Can you, with your mind’s eye, see him rising up into heaven? I do not know what the disciples saw last. Probably each one saw some distinguishing feature in the glorified Christ which they best remembered. But I am sure that they all beheld those distinguishing marks in his hands. Those hands bore the marks of the Crucified One. We cannot mistake him. This is the One who was nailed to the tree for us. What do these nail pierced hands tell us?

Those nail pierced hands identify our Lord. They tell us who he is. As the disciples beheld those blessed hands, with the nail holes still in them, they knew that it was indeed their Lord. And, when we see our Redeemer in glory, we shall know him by the prints of the nails in his hands. Yes, even in glory, our Lord bears the marks of his crucifixion. He appears in glory as “*a Lamb that*

*had been slain.*” These are the hands that loose the seals and open the book of God’s decrees (Revelation 5:5), and fulfill all that is written in the book (Revelation 10:1-3).

For another thing, those nail pierced hands show us plainly the price of that blessing which Christ bestows. They tell us what he has done. Oh, he blesses us freely and bountifully; but who can tell what those blessings of grace have cost him?

“There’s ne’er a gift His hand bestows,  
But cost His heart a groan!”

Yes, we are freely blessed; but every blessing we enjoy so freely is given to us by the nail pierced hands of our Redeemer. Had he not been nailed to that tree to die in our place, we could never have been saved. — *“The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.”* We get everything through those nail pierced hands of our Lord. Righteousness is in those pierced hands. Redemption is in those pierced hands. Pardon is in those pierced hands. Peace is in those pierced hands.

With the touch of his nail pierced hand, the Son of God heals the sin-sick soul. Sinners cannot get any good thing, except through those nail pierced hands. These hands are the ladder which Jacob saw reaching from earth to heaven and from heaven to earth. Those nail pierced hands hold the keys of life. Those nail pierced hands open the gates of heaven. Those nail pierced hands are the only Refuge for our souls.

It is a great blessing just to look at those nail pierced hands. We would care nothing about merely seeing those hands with the mortal eye of this flesh out of curiosity. But, oh, what a blessing it is to look upon the nail pierced hands of our Redeemer with the eye of faith! Looking upon those nail pierced hands we are made to weep and mourn because of our sin. It was our sin that pierced him. Beholding his nail pierced hands we know that he has carried away all our sins, that he finished our salvation, and that we *“shall never perish.”*

By lifting up those nail pierced hands to bless his disciples, our Lord Jesus epitomized the gospel. Those hands were pierced in crucifixion so that they might be lifted up in salvation. There is

the sinner's Substitute going up to heaven with those nail pierced hands; and as he goes he scatters the blessing of grace upon us. The blessings of salvation could not be ours in any other way than through the nail pierced hands of our Substitute. Fall down before him and ask him to stretch over you those nail pierced hands.

## Sovereign's Hands

The nail pierced hands of our Lord Jesus Christ now hold the scepter of total and sovereign dominion. They are the hands of him who alone is the Sovereign of the universe. We look back to Calvary and see those hands pierced in our redemption. We look back at Mt. Olivet and see those nail pierced hands lifted up to bless us. Now, we look up to heaven and see that those nail pierced hands, which bless us, rule the world for us (John 17:1-2; Psalm 68:17-18; Romans 14:9).

The nail pierced hands of our Christ hold the scepter of universal providence. *"All things were made by him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist"* (Colossians 1:16-17). All men are in his hands. All the demons of hell are in his hands. All events are in his hands.

"He's got the whole world in His hands,  
He's got the whole wide world in His hands!"

King Jesus has power and control over all things, so that he might give eternal life to all those for whom his hands were pierced. Those nail pierced hands, which bless us, rule all things for the church he redeemed with his own precious blood (Revelation 1:16; Ephesians 1:19-23). Our Lord says, *"I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."* And in those nail-prints the Son of God reads all the names of all his people. Those hands protect us. Those hands provide for us. Those hands preserve us. Those hands will present us faultless, unblameable, and unproveable before the presence of his glory in heaven.

In the resurrection morning we shall see the nail pierced hands of our Redeemer. What a glorious sight that will be! When

Rachel held Jacob's hands, they must have appeared most precious to her. They bore the marks of his fourteen years of loving toil for her. And when we see the nail-prints in the hands of our Redeemer, we shall see the marks of his loving toil by which he redeemed us.

The nail pierced hands of our Lord Jesus Christ hold the scepter of righteous judgment, too. Those hands will slay all his enemies. And those hands will be held up as our only plea and our only defense in that great day. Have you seen Christ? Have you seen those hands pierced to redeem, lifted up to bless, exalted to save? — "*Him hath God exalted with his own right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and the forgiveness of sins*" (Acts 5:31). Those nail pierced hands are able to save. They are full of forgiveness. Those nail pierced hands should compel us to worship him. They should cause us to consecrate ourselves to the glory of our Savior. Those nail pierced hands should fill us with comfort and joy. They should inspire us with patience. Those blessed hands, those nail pierced hands will accomplish God's eternal purpose in all things. — "*The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands.*" May it please the Lord now to lift up his nail pierced hands to bless you, today, tomorrow and forever.

Amen.